



JEEVADHARA

SOCIO-RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS - II

Edited by

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Editorial

Jeevadhara September 2014 issue carried articles under the theme "Socio-religious Movements – Part I" and this year's September issue continues with the same theme as Part II. There are a number of religious movements across the globe that keep their religions vibrant and relevant. They make considerable impact on their people's life and thought. Religions are more and more awakened to the problems of the world and avail themselves in contemporary world as socially engaged institutions. Religious movements generally start with charismatic personalities, later to be christened as gurus, and continue to serve the society. In this, they also get connected to economics and politics. Given the secular nature of countries like India and others too, every religious community has the freedom to grow and to come to prominence. To this end, Governments support the efforts of religious communities through their organizations. Indian secularism is not opposed to the Government's involvement in the affairs of various religious communities. For example, it supports the educational institutions managed by religious groups and it subsidizes events like pilgrimages taken to the Holy Land, Mecca (Haj), etc. And it involves itself openly and subtly many other ways. It may be interesting to study the politics-religion combine in India and across the globe. In the present issue, one would see this element of mutual support and exchange, and their considerable involvement in society.

Elise Anne DeVido from Duke Kunshan University, China, explains in her article on Master Cheng Yen, the Buddhist nun from Taiwan, about her commitment to the Buddhist bodhisattva ideal in ushering nirvana to the poor and the needy, which has made Cheng Yen, another Mother Teresa in her home country. Along this line, Qiu Yonghui from the Institute of World Religions, CASS, China, describes about the

growth of Matha Amritanandamayi, the female *hugging* Mother *Amma*, who came to prominence quickly in the eyes of the public and the Government through her Math's educational and health services to the society of all categories of people. Leo Lefebure from Georgetown University, Washington DC, surveys the impact of Said Nursi and the Nur Movement on Muslims across the globe. In India, the tribal population abounds to 104 million according to the 2011 census report. Agapit Tirkey narrates the story of the *Christian tribals* and how they came to be politically a strong movement within their majority homeland states in the North and Northeast of India. Uma Maheswari's article *Hari Katha* or the story of Hari is a good example of how Hindus in India sustain their spirituality and devotion down the ages. Like Harikatha (and Ramkatha, one of Hari or Vishnu's incarnations), there are any number of narratives that reach to all categories of Hindus through oral, written, and visual media and through various art forms like music and dance. The *Anuvrata* movement, popularized and made vibrant by the Jaina Acharya Tulsi, is the hallmark of global Jainism in practice. It literally admonishes one to follow the ethics of *Ahimsa* in daily life. Priyadarshana Jain from the Department of Jainology, University of Madras, shows how this ethical sapling has grown into a big fruit-yielding tree, transforming personal and collective life of Indians, particularly the Jains.

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Master Cheng Yen and the Buddhist Tzu Chi Compassion-Relief Foundation¹

Elise Anne DeVido

The article narrates the story of Master Cheng Yen, the Buddhist nun from Taiwan, about her commitment to the Buddhist bodhisattva ideal in ushering nirvana to the poor and the needy **Dr. Elise Anne DeVido** (elise.divido@gmail.com), currently a professor of history at Duke Kunshan University in China, lived in Taiwan for over fifteen years and there she served as Secretary-General of the Taipei Ricci Institute, and taught history at National Chengchi University and at National Taiwan Normal University. Her publication in 2010 is *Taiwan's Buddhist Nuns* by SUNY Press.

Master Cheng Yen has been compared with Mother Teresa and Albert Schweitzer, and her followers consider her to be the incarnation of the Bodhisattva Guanyin, a loving, patient, and kind mother, and a benevolent and wise teacher. She has won many humanitarian awards and TIME magazine 2011 named her one of the world's one hundred most influential people. The Taiwan-based Buddhist nun Cheng Yen (pronounced "Juhng Yen") leads the Buddhist Tzu Chi Compassion-Relief Foundation, "Tzu Chi" for short, meaning "Compassion" and "Relief" (pronounced Tsuh Gee, as in the letter "G"). Tzu Chi is an

¹ There are numerous works on the Tzu Chi organization, for example: André Laliberté, *The Politics of Buddhist Organizations in Taiwan, 1989-2003: Safeguard the Faith, Build a Pure Land, Help the Poor*. London: Routledge, 2004; C. Julia Huang, *Charisma and Compassion: Cheng Yen and the Buddhist Tzu Chi Movement*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009; Elise Anne DeVido, *Taiwan's Buddhist Nuns*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2010; Mark O'Neill, *Tzu Chi: Serving with Compassion*. Singapore: Wiley, 2010; Yu-chuang Yao, *Taiwan's Tzu Chi as Engaged Buddhism: Origins, Organization, Appeal, and Social Impact*. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2012.

international NGO with a board of lay trustees, claimed by some sources to be the largest civil organization in Taiwan. Worldwide membership numbers over ten million members, with branches all over Taiwan and over forty-seven countries including India and the United States. Though around one hundred nuns live in residence at the Tzu Chi headquarters, Tzu Chi is primarily a lay organization whose missions include charity and disaster relief, medical care and research (including hospitals and the first bone marrow bank in Taiwan); an education system (from kindergarten to graduate school and a medical school); culture (TV stations, videos, magazines, books, cafés); and environmental protection.

Who is Master Cheng Yen and what is Tzu Chi's philosophy? What are Tzu Chi's most notable contributions to society in Taiwan and the globe? Cheng Yen and Tzu Chi have received countless accolades in Taiwan and worldwide and has become an exemplar of Buddhist philanthropy. But for the past year or so, Taiwan's media has exploded with criticisms of Tzu Chi on a number of issues. What does this reveal about recent socio-political change in Taiwan? First we turn to Cheng Yen's early years, her family background, and the circumstances that led her to become a Buddhist nun.³

Wang Jinyun was born in Qingshui, Taichung County in 1937.⁴ Her paternal uncle and his wife adopted her when she was an infant and moved to Fengyuan; her coming "brought luck" to the childless couple as they subsequently had children of their own. Wang Jinyun grew up

² As claimed by the Tzu Chi Foundation on their website, www.us.tzuchi.org. Their main website is in Chinese, www.tzuchi.org.tw

³ For details of Cheng Yen's biography I have relied on Chen Huijian, *Zhengyan fashide Ciji shijie* [Master Zhengyan's World of Ciji]. Taipei: Ciji Culture, 1983, 1984, 1989; Shih Cheng Yen, *Still Thoughts*. Edited by Hsin-chiang Kao. Taipei: Chung Pa Publishing, 1993; Liu King Pong, ed. *Lotus Flower of the Heart: Thirty Years of Tzu Chi Photographs*. Taipei: Still Thoughts Cultural Mission, 1997; Li Yuchen, "Crafting Women's Religious Experience in a Patrilineal Society: Taiwanese Buddhist Nuns in Action (1945-1999). Ph.D. dissertation, Cornell University, 2000.

⁴ Taichung County is a large county located on the north-central west coast of Taiwan.

familiar with the countryside around the town of Fengyuan, although her adoptive parents were not farmers but owned various properties and managed movie theaters in the region. Allusions to the life and landscape of rural Taiwan predominate in Cheng Yen's speeches and writings.

When she was fifteen (some accounts say twelve) years old:

...her mother had stomach ulcers and needed an operation. At that time operations were very risky. Out of filial piety for her mother, Jinyun...vowed to dispel calamities for her mother and prayed to the Bodhisattva Guanyin... 'I, Jinyun, am willing to shorten my own life by twelve years.' Perhaps the heavens and the earth were actually moved by her filial piety, for her mother's disease gradually and miraculously disappeared. Jinyun, full of gratitude, became a vegetarian.⁵

After finishing middle school (few girls of her generation attended high school) Wang Jinyun as eldest child and daughter was obliged to help her family at home and with the movie theater business. Li Yuchen adds that because Jinyun's stepmother was weakened by successive childbirths, Jinyun took on many of her mothers' duties for the family.⁶ When Jinyun was 20, her father suffered a stroke and died the next day. This sudden death of her father, who had always been strong and healthy, was "a major blow to [her]...She began to search for a place to take refuge, seeking the origin and boundaries of life, looking for the answers to the riddle of impermanence."⁷ Acting in the capacity of both father and mother of the family, she first put family matters into order as best as she could for her mother and four younger brothers and then began a several-years' journey into rural areas of central and eastern Taiwan. This journey involved pivotal encounters with her first Buddhist teacher, an abbess from a local nunnery; an ill aboriginal woman; three Catholic nuns; and her teacher

⁵ Shih Cheng Yen (Kao, ed.), 1993: 211-12.

⁶ Li 2000:261.

⁷ Liu 1997:33; Shih Cheng Yen (Kao, ed.), 1993:212.

Yinshun (1906-2005), the distinguished Chinese Buddhist monk and scholar who wrote many works on "Humanistic Buddhism". It was this Venerable monk who agreed to sponsor Wang Jinyun as a candidate for ordination as a monk in spring of 1963, and she chose the name "Cheng Yen" for her, meaning "to confirm dignity/solemnity/strictness."

At age 26 Cheng Yen went to Hualien in eastern Taiwan and continued her spiritual cultivation mainly based at Puming Temple. She quickly gained nun disciples and lay followers through her public lectures on the Earth Treasury and Lotus Sutras. She declined several offers to become the head of temples elsewhere, rather, she and her followers remained in Hualien and supported themselves through farming and handicrafts.

But two encounters in 1966 confirmed Cheng Yen's intuition that her vocation lay in medicine and charity work. When she visited a rural clinic for a medical appointment, she was shocked to see a pool of blood on the floor and was told that an aboriginal woman⁸ had hemorrhaged from a miscarriage: although four men had carried her across the mountains for eight hours to reach the clinic, she was refused medical care because her family could not afford the fees.⁹ She vowed to improve the state of health care in remote areas of Taiwan.

One day, three Catholic nuns called upon Cheng Yen at her temple. In the course of their conversation, the nuns queried: though the central tenet of Buddhism is compassion, how have Buddhists contributed to society, such as building schools and hospitals? At that point in time, Cheng Yen could not answer them. Therefore Cheng Yen had thought that she and her disciples would follow a traditional Buddhist life of contemplation. But she reasoned that vast potential energies of Buddhist compassion could best be realized with strong organization and funding, for without it, compassion remains but an abstraction, and thus founded

⁸ Taiwan is home to 16 different tribes whose members are of Austronesian, not Chinese, background, around 2% of Taiwan's total population.

⁹ In an sad turn of events forty years later, in 2003 the family of the doctor in question sued Tzu Chi for defamation (though neither Cheng Yen nor Tzu Chi publications had ever mentioned the doctor's name) and in September the Tzu Chi organization was ordered by the court to pay NT\$ 1.01 million (about US\$ 30,000) to the plaintiffs; Cheng Yen decided not to appeal.

the Tzu Chi Compassion-Relief Foundation in 1966. She vowed to follow the exhortations of her teacher, Venerable Yinshun: "At all times do everything for Buddhism, everything for sentient beings;" to focus on "Here...now...this person," and build a Pure Land on earth. Thus Tzu Chi's began humbly, as a devout group of 30 rural housewives who saved a few pennies each day in a bamboo cylinder, and grew to a global organization of women, men and young people, both volunteers and paid professionals, carrying out their missions of charity, medicine, education, culture, international relief, bone marrow donation, environmental protection, and building community volunteer networks.

Tzu Chi members, like many laypeople in Chinese history before them, believe that doing good works accrues merit for oneself, one's family, and one's community, and doing so satisfies both Buddhist and Confucian expectations of what a good person should be.¹⁰ Although she was not trained at one of Taiwan's Buddhist institutes for monastics, Cheng Yen has studied the Chinese Buddhist canon and written commentaries on the *Lotus Sutra* and the *Sutra of Immeasurable Meaning*, for example. She gives daily dharma talks that are broadcast worldwide. Arguably her most important work is *Jing Si Aphorisms*. Cheng Yen took the term "still thoughts" from the *Sutra of Immeasurable Meaning* and explained:

'Still Thoughts', as the term suggests, is to maintain a peaceful mind in any situation and to walk into the mundane world with a tranquil mind. Born into this world, we cannot detach ourselves from all the worldly affairs. However, affairs do not go as expected in this world. Therefore, we should deal with the constantly changing world by sticking to our principles while keeping a tranquil mind.¹¹

¹⁰ Ting Ren-jie, "Renjian Buddhism and Its Successors: Toward a Sociological Analysis of Buddhist Awakening in Contemporary Taiwan," in Hsu Mintao, Jinhua Chen, and Lori Meeks, eds. *Development and Practice of Humanitarian Buddhism: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*. Hualien: Tzu Chi University Press, 2007, pp. 249-51; Timothy Brook, *Praying for Power: Buddhism and the Formation of Gentry Society in Late Ming China*. Cambridge, MA: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1993, pp. 105-7; 185-8.

¹¹ Ting Ren-jie in Hsu *et al.*, eds. 2007: 229-267. Quotation is from p. 248.

The popularity of *Jingsi Aphorisms* lies in how it presents central Buddhist and Confucian teachings in simple language, and for children, Cheng Yen presents the aphorisms in the form of stories, cartoons, and music. Tzu Chi has promoted Buddhist teachings skillfully blended with familiar Confucian values like filial piety, social harmony, fulfillment of one's social roles, respect for authority, and the belief that individual moral rectification leads to rectification of the family, society, and nation.¹² *Jingsi Aphorisms* also offers practical and pithy advice on how to face and overcome challenges in love and friendship, marriage and the family, the workplace, and various problems of modern life. *Jingsi Aphorisms* is the backbone of all Tzu Chi missions and is the primary text that Tzu Chi promotes in its interactions with the public, and some critics see too much proselytizing and an overreliance "the thought of Cheng Yen", symptomatic of a "personality cult". But up to the present, *Jingsi Aphorisms* continues to be the main inspirational text to mobilize millions of people from all walks of life around the world.

Of Tzu Chi's many accomplishments, there are some of particularly note.¹³ First has been the organization's powerful appeal to women. She teaches that the so-called feminine virtues of compassion, nurturance, empathy, selflessness, self-sacrifice, patience, and warmth correspond precisely to Buddhist virtues and second, women who become Tzu Chi members have opportunities to learn new skills in counseling, health care, publishing and other mass media, public speaking, organization, foreign travel and foreign languages. In this way, Tzu Chi has extended women's nurturing and healing roles from home to society as well as provided avenues for women to gain self-confidence, new knowledge and a new voice. Since the 1990s Tzu Chi has strengthened its corps of male volunteers, and both female and male professionals in many fields work full-time for Tzu Chi causes around the world.

¹² Shi Cheng Yen, *Still Thoughts* (Trans. Liu King Pong), Vol. II. Taipei: Tzu Chi Cultural Publishing, 1996: 43. 174-5; and Shi Cheng Yen, *Still Thoughts* (Trans. Lin Chia-hui), Vol. I. Taipei: Still Thoughts Cultural Mission, 1993: 160.

¹³ For more discussion of Tzu Chi's appeal to women and its spirit of volunteerism, see DeVido 2010 Chapter 4.

Related to this is how Tzu Chi has greatly strengthened the spirit of volunteerism in Taiwan. Tzu Chi often refers to compassion, *karuna*, and loving kindness, *metta* as *da ai*, “Great Love”, and has promoted the “Bodhisattva path” for all, convincing many people in Taiwan and around the world to emphasize with and assist those outside one’s social circles of family and friends. In other words, Tzu Chi can take a great deal of credit in developing a public consciousness that is crucial for a true civil society.

Next are Tzu Chi’s accomplishments in the medical field. Tzu Chi fulfilled her vow to improve medical care in rural Taiwan and beyond.¹⁴ At Tzu Chi hospitals and clinics in urban and rural Taiwan, patients pay according to their financial ability. Tzu Chi also runs a well-known research hospital at Tzu Chi’s headquarters in Hualien. To take another example, Tzu Chi worked strenuously to overcome popular taboos and legal restrictions against blood and bone marrow donations. The Tzu Chi bone marrow registry was founded in 1993 and became the largest in Asia. In 2002 the registry expanded to include stem cell and gene therapy research. Furthermore, Tzu Chi founded its International Medical Association in 1996, with 58 branches in 11 countries that provides free medical services in 39 countries.

It is remarkable that Tzu Chi has been able to develop their organization in China,¹⁵ since the Communist government since 1949 has restricted the activities of religious groups in China, let alone those of foreign origin due to China’s unhappy experiences with foreign imperialism. In 1991, Tzu Chi for the first time carried out disaster relief in China due to a flood. Because Tzu Chi promised to restrict its activities to relief, charity, and medicine without religious propagation, the Chinese government allowed Tzu Chi to grow and today Tzu Chi has mobilized volunteers in 28 provinces in China. Programs focus on the environment (vegetarianism and recycling) and providing scholarships to needy students. In 2008 Tzu Chi became the first non-PRC organization to be registered with the government, and in 2010

¹⁴ Tzu Chi’s websites have more details about their medical missions.

¹⁵ For more information, see Tzu Chi’s Chinese and English websites.

was the first NGO from overseas to establish a nation-wide charity in China. These accomplishments attest both to Tzu Chi members' diplomatic skills and the huge need in China for the "free goods" of charitable and relief activities.

Another admirable accomplishment is how Tzu Chi rebuilds schools damaged and destroyed during natural disasters. From 1999-2002, Tzu Chi rebuilt fifty public schools in Taiwan damaged during a major earthquake of September 21, 1999.¹⁶ Architects and other professionals donated their time, money and materials to this project. The schools were built according to a "green" philosophy: strive to conserve water and other resources, sort and recycle waste, recycle rainwater for use in restrooms, utilize natural light, ventilation if possible, protect the plants and natural landscapes of each school. Tzu Chi also promotes community engagement in their local schools. Tzu Chi has also built schools in China, Thailand, Indonesia, Myanmar, Haiti, and notably, schools damaged in the 2003 earthquake in Bam, Iran. "The founder and principal architect of [this project], Felino Jun Palafox, described the project as 'one of the most challenging assignments' in his life because he, a Catholic, was asked by a Buddhist organization, Tzu Chi, to rebuild schools for Muslim children. Jun Palafox said in an interview with a Philippine magazine that he feels honored and privileged to take part in this charitable endeavor for reconstructing what once was a great and historically rich city in the Middle East and for participating in this surprising demonstration of Buddhist, Muslim and Catholic cooperation."¹⁷

Tzu Chi also took the lead in shaping a public discourse on illness, dying, and death, previously taboo topics in Chinese society, through publications, community classes, and public advocacy. In particular, Tzu Chi is a pioneer in the field of hospice care in Taiwan. Tzu Chi's work in medicine and "end of life" issues has convinced some families

¹⁶ See DeVido 2010 Chapter 3.

¹⁷ Tzu Chi Foundation USA. "Iran: Tzu Chi rebuilding five schools in quake-stricken Bam." 1 June 2005. <http://reliefweb.int/report/iran-islamic-republic/iran-tzu-chi-rebuilding-five-schools-quake-stricken-bam>. Accessed July 5, 2015.

in Taiwan to donate their own or loved ones' bodies, which Tzu Chi members call "Silent Mentors", for medical research and education.¹⁸

A closer look at Tzu Chi's mission of environmental protection is a good way to better understand Cheng Yen's Buddhist worldview and see how she translates this into practical actions. Since the 1980s, spurred by Taiwan's environmental movement, Tzu Chi has promoted environmental awareness, recycling, and conservation to a greater extent than the other major Buddhist groups in Taiwan. Cheng Yen seems to have been inspired by the "Earth-as-Gaia" philosophy that posits the earth is a living and breathing organism and perhaps by popular religious texts such as the *Dimu jing*, Earth Mother Scripture as well. She is well informed on current debates on global warming, carbon footprints, the greenhouse effect, etc.¹⁹ For the new millennium, Cheng Yen believes the Buddha's mission is to save our Mother Earth and each of us must wash the earth clean and purify human hearts.²⁰ First purify one's mind of cravings, desire for material pleasures, negativity, and violence, then one can act in a pure way and this leads to purifying the world.

As a Buddhist and a believer in Chinese correlative cosmology, in her view many natural disasters are man-made, not only due to human abuse of the environment but also from humanity's "accumulated negative karma" and general human moral depravity which upsets cosmological harmony. She believes in the Buddhist notion of the apocalyptic potential for human renewal: major disasters will awaken a few humans to repent, who can rebuild civilization. Moreover, Cheng Yen believes that there is a direct connection between the turn of the new century and the great number of disasters occurring around the world; she claims that the world is now in the Buddhist period of decline.²¹ At the same time, she exhorts that we can and must do all to

¹⁸ See Tzu Chi's Chinese and English websites.

¹⁹ Cheng Yen, "Yuwang shao yidian, ai diqiu duo yidian" [Have fewer desires, and love the Earth more] *Tzu Chi Monthly*, No. 484, March 25, 2007: 6-9.

²⁰ Shanhu Shuyuan, ed. *Zhengyan fashi nalu zuji* [Venerable Zhengyan's Footprints]. Taipei: Ciji Culture Press, 1999: 300-1.

²¹ Cheng Yen, "Yuwang shao yidian, ai diqiu duo yidian" [Have fewer desires, and love the Earth more], 2007: 9.

protect and restore the global environment: humans must learn to peacefully co-exist with nature to slow the current pace toward world destruction.²² Cheng Yen believes social and global change will occur most meaningfully by cultivating individual morality, self-restraint, and the powers of empathy. Drawing from the *Book of Rites* and the *Analects*, Tzu Chi promotes the “*keji fuli*, movement:” overcome one’s desires and revive courtesy, to not only reduce one’s needs and consumption habits but to shape harmonious ties of mutual respect among people.²³

The cycle of natural disasters lead back to human kind. When people have less and less respect for Mother Nature, she will surely respond with endless calamities. The Buddha said, ‘All creatures share a common karma because we all receive the results of our actions.’ Why have we forgotten to treat one another first with gratitude, contentment, good will and understanding? In our loss of respect for each other, there is not enough love or an awakening of our innate universal love. Should we remember that all creatures in the universe are one, we would then know to let go of our egotism, set aside our mutual misunderstanding, and eliminate our selfishness. From the depths of our hearts will arise a reverent love for all beings and we will return to the true, clear essence of our human nature.²⁴

As for practical action, Tzu Chi has long promoted recycling. In 2008 Tzu Chi founded an affiliate body called the “Great Love Technology Company” that sells environmentally-friendly clothing and

²² Cheng Yen, “Renhuo you xin qi, aixin qunji cai neng meihua shehui” [Human disasters arise from the heart: amassing loving-hearts is the way to improve society], July 17, 2000. <http://news.tzuchi.net/HopeProject.nsf>. Accessed August 2, 2015. Cheng Yen, “Huanhui qishijian de huimiequ” [Reverse the current course toward world destruction], October 9, 2001. <http://news.tzuchi.net/HopeProject.nsf>. Accessed July 10, 2015.

²³ “Youli ze an” [If there is courtesy, there is peace]. *Tzu Chi Monthly*, No. 484, March 25, 2007, Editorial.

²⁴ “This is Tzu Chi.” Dec. 28, 2009.

http://www.us.tzuchi.org/us/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=353%3Athis-is-tzu-chi&catid=58%3Atzuchi&Itemid=181&lang=en. Accessed August 11, 2015.

household items, in particular turning PET bottles collected by Tzu Chi recycling stations into fabric for blankets, clothing, tote bags, and luggage. All proceeds are said to fund Tzu Chi's charitable missions. Overall, Tzu Chi focuses on the individual as in the "80/20 Plan": Eat until you are 80% full and donate the remaining 20% in savings to charity. Also, use less energy like air conditioning, drive less, and eat less meat if at all.²⁵ Critics say that such conservation suggestions are unoriginal and have limited impact in the face of industrial and agricultural waste of resources. Absent from Cheng Yen's sermons overall is any specific critique of the structural causes of environmental degradation such as government support of wasteful industrial and agricultural development or disregard of pollution and construction regulations. But Cheng Yen believes the solution starts with the individual who acts as a bodhisattva in the world: motivated by compassion, one takes vows to relieve sentient beings' suffering.

Up to a few years ago, few openly criticized Tzu Chi since the organization contributed so greatly to Taiwan and the world. There were some earlier "rumblings" such as Tzu Chi is too large an enterprise and absorbs too many donations and resources; and that it lacks transparency about their finances, membership rolls, and decision-making process, while some people resent the help Tzu Chi gives to China and other foreign countries without first assisting all the needy in Taiwan.²⁶ Other critics argue that teaching *Jingsi Aphorisms* in Taiwan's public schools violates the principle of neutrality stipulated in Article Six of the Basic Education Law of the Republic of China that prohibits proselytizing by religious or political groups in public schools.²⁷

²⁵ Shao Wei Chia and Johan Alwall. "Three Easy Steps to Save the Earth." June 23, 2013. http://www.us.tzuchi.org/us/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2050%3A3-easy-steps-to-save-the-earth&catid=129%3Aenvironmental-protection&Itemid=349&lang=en. Accessed July 22, 2015.

²⁶ C. Julia Huang. "Recapturing Charisma: Emotion and Rationalization in a Globalizing Buddhist Movement from Taiwan." Ph.D. dissertation, Boston University, 2001: 255-60.

²⁷ Huang Long-min and Chen Chien-zong. "'Jingsiyu jiaoxue' zai guomin zhongxiaoxue shishi shiqiuxing zhi pingxi" [An analysis of the suitability of implementing the 'Still Thoughts Curriculum' in public primary and middle schools]. *Taichung shiyuan xuebao*, No. 16, July 2002: 159-76.

And over the years there has been some friction between some aboriginal groups and Tzu Chi. For example, spokespeople for one aboriginal community, including a Christian minister, said that while they are grateful for the new housing and new churches [many aboriginals are Christian] that Tzu Chi built for them after a powerful storm, they felt that Tzu Chi did not respect this community's customs and religion. The reasons given were two: First, Tzu Chi adorned the new churches with selections from *Jingsi Aphorisms* as well as pictures of the Guanyin Bodhisattva rather than seek the community's input on what symbols and totems should be included in the churches' and homes' design. Tzu Chi also placed a marker with the Tzu Chi logo at the entrance to the community. Second, they said that Tzu Chi was too heavy-handed in their proselytization by moralizing against smoking, drinking, betel-nut, and hunting. The spokespersons for the aboriginal community claimed that in all these actions not only did Tzu Chi contravene its claim to respect other cultures and religions but also the 2007 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.²⁸

Finally there are debates surrounding the term "Engaged Buddhism". Some scholars have used the term "Engaged Buddhism" to describe the orientation of a number of prominent Buddhist organizations in Taiwan including Tzu Chi because they are socially-engaged in numerous missions to promote charity, medical care, education, environmentalism. But other scholars and activists believe that "...the distinctive new feature of Engaged Buddhism is to challenge the present system with a new paradigm of activities and programs, not merely an activity that cleans up social problems without confronting their roots" in structural violence.²⁹

But as mentioned above, Cheng Yen believes that individual and social suffering have primarily moral and spiritual causes. In fact, the

²⁸ Xie Guorong, "Tzu Chi and Aborigines: Fusion and Conflict," August 20, 2010. <http://www.appledaily.com.tw/appledaily/article/headline/20100820/32752253>. Accessed July 30, 2015.

²⁹ Jonathan Watts. International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB). Email; Feb. 4, 2004.

Tzu Chi organization forbids its nuns, members, and employees from participating in formal politics or socio-political activism. "Fighting for the downtrodden and shouting about justice will make the situations even more complicated and confused... (a) sense of responsibility is more important than a sense of justice."³⁰ In sum, Tzu Chi advocates for a process of peaceful evolution, with emphasis on the individual transformation prerequisite for wider social change. Tzu members argue that their approach is in fact "radical" and in full accordance with fundamental Buddhist teachings, because Cheng Yen calls for a total and holistic reorientation in values and psychology that aims to eliminate suffering, and thus would transform the individual and society far beyond what schemes for socio-political reform could accomplish.³¹

For almost fifty years Master Cheng Yen and Tzu have received nearly universal praise and support for their missions. Yet in early 2015 Taiwan's media exploded with allegations and critique concerning the Tzu Chi organization on a number of issues. The original "spark" was a controversy over Tzu Chi's US\$40.4 million purchase of land in an environmentally-protected area located in a Taipei suburb that has pitted Tzu Chi, the city government, local residents, environmental groups, and the media against each other. When the current Taipei mayor lashed out against Tzu Chi's actions, this released a firestorm (one source said "a witch hunt") of complaints and allegations against Tzu Chi, serious and less so, some decades' old. Tzu Chi has since cancelled this project, which was to develop the land in question for a disaster coordination center. Some of the complaints against Tzu Chi include the following: their annual financial statements released to the public are simply short summaries and not certified by accountants; Tzu Chi, a tax-exempt religious group, owns "too much" land property: The value of their holdings in *Greater Taipei alone* is estimated at

³⁰ André Laliberté, "Religious Change and Democratization in Postwar Taiwan: Mainstream Buddhist Organizations and the Kuomintang," in Philip Clart and Charles B. Jones, eds. *Religion in Modern Taiwan: Tradition and Innovation in a Changing Society*. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 2003:178-9.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 179

US\$ 1.27 billion; and Tzu Chi, registered as a religious organization has become too concerned with branding, with its stores selling overpriced items like chopsticks, bowls and clothing.³²

A useful editorial in a Taiwan newspaper suggested that the land dispute reflects three important social changes in Taiwan in recent years. "First, the Taiwanese people have become distrustful of everything because of frustrations caused by political gridlock and economic stagnation." It should be added that social media is also a factor. While freedom of speech is welcome in democratic societies, irresponsible use of social media can foster rumors, slander, and abuse. Second is the growing gap between rich and poor in some sectors in Taiwan: some Buddhist and Daoist temples in Taiwan have become astonishingly wealthy. Moreover, they are tax-exempt and "...the government has turned a blind eye to management of religious bodies." Third, Tzu Chi has become too commercialized and "too secular" and "...has lost the power to move people the way it used to, when Dharma Master Cheng Yen made candles and sewed baby shoes by hand to help the poor." The editorial concludes by suggesting that Tzu Chi become more transparent in their operations and "return to its original mission of caring for those in need."³³ Although in the short term

³² For more information about the Tzu Chi's land development project, see The China Post. "City officials, Nei Hu residents welcome Tzu Chi retreat from project." March 11, 2015. <http://chinapost.com.tw/taiwan/local/taipei/2015/03/17/431281/City-officials.htm>. Accessed Aug 1, 2015. And see *Civilmedia@Taiwan*. "A Shade of Tzu Chi in the Development Case of Nei Hu." <http://www.civilmedia.tw/archives/27956#>. Accessed August 10, 2015. On financial statements, "Tzu Chi vows to increase financial transparency." March 6, 2015. <http://m.chinapost.com.tw/taiwan/2015/03/06/430384/Tzu-chi-vows.htm>. On "too much property," see Central News Agency. "United Daily News: Tzu Chi row reflects three social changes." March 3, 2015. http://www.taiwannews.com.tw/etn/news_content.php?id=2696775. Accessed August 3, 2015. On over-commercialization and branding, see "Tzu Chi Tea and Crystal Sculptures too expensive? Netizen: But you are buying cultural creativity and compassion!" ETToday, March 6, 2015. <http://www.ettoday.net/news/20150306/474534.htm>. Accessed July 24, 2015. On Tzu Chi's "excessive" wealth, see Li Qingyi. "What if Tzu Chi expands without end?" Liberty Times, March 3, 2015. <http://talk.ltn.com.tw/article/paper/866546>. Accessed July 24, 2015.

³³ Central News Agency. "United Daily News: Tzu Chi row reflects three social changes." March 3, 2015. http://www.taiwannews.com.tw/etn/news_content.php?id=2696775. Accessed August 3, 2015.

Tzu Chi most likely will not downsize their operations, they have already stated that they will disclose their financial books including lists of donors; will reorganize the board of directors; and will take into consideration the public's other criticism and suggestions.

Perhaps there is a karmic link, since the wave of criticisms and allegations coincides with the fiftieth-anniversary of Tzu Chi's founding in 1966. The time for painful introspection and restructuring has come. Cheng Yen is nearly 80 years old: how will Tzu Chi organization continue after her passing? Will there be a nun or lay successor and/or a board of trustees? Should future leaders reconfigure Tzu Chi as a secular non-profit organization? Should they scale back Tzu Chi operations? No matter what direction Tzu Chi takes, the genius of Cheng Yen and the record of Tzu Chi's good works are unique, and as the organization has done for the past fifty years, it will continue to evolve in tandem with the social and economic transformations in Taiwan and the world over.

New Religious Movements in India: The Mata Amritanandamayi Math

Qiu Yonghui

The article describes about the growth of Matha Amritanandamayi, the female *hugging* Mother *Amma*, who came to prominence through her institutional service to people. **Dr. Qiu Yonghui** (yonghuiq@aliyun.com) works in Department of Contemporary Religions, Institute of World Religions, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing. He is also Vice President, Chinese Association of South Asian Studies. Dr. Qiu's special interests are in the area of religious movements, contemporary religions and politics in India and China, and religious pluralism. Her latest books are *A General Introduction to Hinduism* (2012) and *Religious Pluralism in India* (2009).

Introduction

Of all types of social movements in contemporary India, religious and sectarian movements have, by and large, been predominant. For a long time religious ideas have often been the language of protest, innovation and expression of individuality as well as separate identity. They provide an enormous scope for reinterpretation in order not only to legitimize the aspiration of various sections of the population but also to justify changes in the existing order of social relationships. Clearly, these movements meet the emotional and spiritual needs of those suffering from the destructive impact of colonialism, modernization and globalization in a familiar world. Research on new religious movements,¹ therefore, always has a unique significance in a country

¹ There has been disagreement among the scholars around the world on the categorization of New Religious Movements (NRMs). However, if the categorization of new religious movements is considered to be a very big umbrella, all religious movements (sectarian movement, religious reform movement, new religious movement, social-religious movement, etc.) can be included.

like India where religious faith is a dynamic conditioning factor for the vast majority of people. Furthermore, India has long been known for being "a *Guru* factory" and these spiritual teachers have played an active role in bringing solace to the masses at the global forum. Consequently, they have an international influence as well.

The present paper is the end product of a case study conducted on the Mata Amritanandamayi Math, a comparatively new religious movement with headquarters located in Kerala. Having a history of less than 25 years the Math has been in existence under the guidance of an uneducated female *Guru*, popularly known as Mata Amritanandamayi alias Amma, whose disciples are scattered all over the world.

Methodological Framework

The study places the Mata Amritanandamayi Math within a larger and more integrated paradigm of modernization in India and globalization in the world. It also examines the growth of this particular religious movement in the Hindu religious and socio-political contexts at the local level, and in the spiritual context at the global level.

To explain the fast development of any new religious movement, one must trace the struggle of a particular *Guru* and consequently one will see that the growth of the mission depends on the local religious culture. By comparing the Math with other new religious movements, the study will find out if the Math has developed new concepts and practices and if it has, whether or not they are working properly, adjusting to this rapidly changing world. Research on the types of education, the function of relief programs and the ways of the Ashram and Mission Trust management, therefore, always has a unique significance in understanding the interaction between religion and the state.

The methodology used in this research project includes firstly, an acquisition of historical materials on the new religious movements in India especially since the 19th century onwards, a collection of materials dealing with the history of Kerala as well as all the publications issued under the auspices of the Mission Trust. Secondly, an intensive field work was undertaken which includes participant observation, surveys

and interviews done during this researcher's stay in the Ashram.² And lastly, a content analysis was done on the data and documents collected during the entire period of this research work.

Mata Amritanandamayi Math:

The Math in the Hindu Context

Amma (meaning mother) is the head of the Mata Amritanandamayi Math and Mission Trust, which was founded at Kollam in the South Indian state of Kerala on 6 May 1981. Amma was described in the subtitle of a cover story in *The Week* (21 September 2003): "once an illiterate girl, Amritanandamayi at 50 is a global guru who heads a spiritual empire". The Emergence of Amma and the Hugging Methodology Amma (meaning mother) is the head of the Mata Amritanandamayi Math and Mission Trust, which was founded at Kollam in the South Indian state of Kerala on 6 May 1981.

The emergence of Amma owes much to "a band of youths". "By the end of 1978, the nucleus of the Ashram grew when a group of well-educated young men, renouncing home and life in the world, took refuge at the feet of the Holy Mother. ...Most of them...belonged to upper class families".³ Having noticed the depth and simplicity of Amma's explanations, this group of educated young men began writing down her teachings. They collected Amma's words, conversations and speeches, then also selected and translated them into English. They realized "the highest state of consciousness from where Amma is speaking" and took lead in reproducing these divine utterances.⁴

Reproductions of Amma's speeches and conversations, "humbly offered" by this particular group of young men, not only reflected the manifestation of the Math but also served as textbooks for devotees. The Ashram Trust has published more than thirty books and some of them are available in as many as twenty-five languages.

² Ashram is a place where spiritual seekers and aspirants live or visit to lead a spiritual life.

³ Swami Amritaswarupananda. *Mata Amritanandamayi: A Biography*. India: Mata Amritanandamayi Mission Trust, p. 176, 1988.

⁴ Swami Amritaswarupananda. *From Amma's Heart: Conversations with Sri Mata Amritanandamayi Devi*. Translated by Swami Amritaswarupananda. India: Mata Amritanandamayi Mission Trust, 2004.

In the West, the media often describes Amma as the 'Hugging Saint'. In the past twenty-five years, Amma has personally embraced more than 24 million people from all parts of the world using what is known as the hugging method. The methodology of uplifting people by simply caressing everyone who comes to her and holding them close to her heart in a loving embrace can be seen during *Darshan*⁵ time (everyday from 9 am to 2 or 3 pm). Amma's hug is called the "Hug Awaken". Amma explains that "It is not a mere hug, but one that awakens the spiritual principles.... That pure vibration of love purifies people, and this helps them achieve their inner awakening and spiritual growth." Amma believes that "both men and women of today's world need to be awakened to motherly qualities. Amma's hugs are to help people become aware of this universal need."⁶

Outsiders think that Amma's methodology of hugging people is a progressive step or even an action of "defying tradition" in a caste-based conservative society where women are not supposed to touch strangers. The fact that a woman from a fisherfolk family embraces people from everywhere is a great leap forward if we consider that Kerala was once the worst example of caste division and colour prejudice in the whole of India and that the evils of untouchability and inapproachability were predominant in society (The Census Report of Cochin, 1911). By the second half of the 19th century, punishments varied according to the caste and social status of the offenders. Amma certainly has defied the "keeping distance" tradition in 'the Mad-house of India' (the name Swami Vivekananda gave to Kerala).

Service Doctrine and Vedanta to Live by

Amma considers love as her religion. For the purpose of sending the message of love to all her "children" (devotees), Amma has developed a set of "Service Doctrine". Her advocacy expressed in the statement "Serve people to serve God" is interconnected with her idea of God: "We should understand that God is not confined to the

⁵ Darshan is an audience with or a vision of the Divine or a holy person. But in Amma's case, it refers to receiving a hug from Amma.

⁶ Swami Amritaswarupananda: *Amma's Heart*, 2004 Op. Cit. p. 94

temple or the church. God is within each one of us. Whenever we share what we have with others and help one another, we are, in fact, worshipping God".⁷ Amma believes that "a compassionate heart is a far more precious dwelling place to God than any silken couch or golden throne".⁸ Says Amma about herself: "I am the servant of servants". According to her, the link between God, Guru and devotees is love and, therefore, she worships devotees.

As a Hindu religious organization of a Hindu Guru, Amma's Math obviously had to provide a Hindu way of worship (*puja*). Though there is temple worship in Amma's Math, (a Math temple is known as *Brahmasthanam* temple)⁹ it is an absolutely new mode of worship for the devotees. Each *Brahmasthanam* temple contains an unconventional *Pratishta* (*murti* or image of God) which graphically illustrates the principle of unity in diversity. Amma experimented with the practicality of this new form and came to the conclusion that ceremonial worship performed by a large group is many times more powerful than individual worship. Another important feature of such worship (*puja*) is that the devotee is enjoined to perform the worship himself rather than ask a priest to do it for him.

As far as the *Bhavas Bhava*¹⁰ is concerned, Amma's devotees believe that Lord Krishna and Devi enter the Holy Mother's body three nights a week. During this period she brings out everything that is inside her and manifests those Divine Beings in order to bless her devotees. Bhava Darshan is simply one of Amma's ways of serving devotees, plunged as it is in the deep quagmire of worldliness. During Darshan, any question can be asked irrespective of who the questioner

⁷ Sri Mata Amritanandamayi: *Lead us to the Light: A Collection of Amma's Teachings*. 2 vols. India: Mata Amritanandamayi Centre. P. 59.2001.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ The *Brahmasthanam: An Epoch-making Temple*. India: Mata Amritanandamayi Mission Trust. 1989.

¹⁰ The great masters of India have classified Divine Incarnations into three main categories: Purna Avatara (full or perfect), Amsa Avatara (partial manifestation) and Avesa Avatara (temporary overshadowing by divine power). Amma belongs to the third category.

is - a theist, an atheist, a rationalist or an antagonist. The Mother gently, calmly, and affectionately answers questions without hurting people or belittling their ideas.

A significant development took place on 27 August 1982, when Amma started a Vedanta Vidyalaya (School) in order to impart traditional knowledge in Vedanta and Sanskrit to the residents of the Ashram. By defending the basic concepts and practices of the Vedanta system, Math gradually turned into a movement within this dominant system in Hinduism.

Math is neither a dissenting group nor an anti-systematic movement in the Hindu tradition. The basic Hindu concepts like Brahman, Maya, Dharma,¹¹ Pure Consciousness, Advaita, Mahabharata Battle, etc., are always explained in the traditional way. Amma herself admits that "Advaita is the foundation of everything" and what she teaches is practical devotion that is rooted in Advaita." In order to make sure that people can really understand the Supreme Being, Sri Krishna, Amma asks them to "survey the Lord's action from the proper perspective", for "if we look through eyes tainted with doubts, everything will appear to be wrong." She emphasizes that "it is because the Lord's teachings haven't been properly absorbed that India has deteriorated to such an extent."¹²

Amma has been "re-explaining" the Hindu world vision and yet she never forgot to remind her devotees of the Hindu lifestyle: "Eat only what is necessary, speak only when necessary. Sleep only as long as you need. Spend the remaining time doing good deeds. Do not waste a single moment in life. Try to make your life beneficial for others as well".¹³ She believes that "spirituality isn't something to be just talked about; it has to be lived".¹⁴ As a grass root level guru, Amma strongly criticizes the so-called Brahmins who have a wrong vision of *Maya*.

¹¹ Dharma in Sanskrit means 'that which upholds' (creation). Dharma has several meanings in the Hindu context but one common definition is that it deals with the spiritual upliftment and general well being of all human beings.

¹² See "The Lord of Yoga- Protector of Dharama," n.10, pp. 86-113.

¹³ Sri Mata Amritanandamayi: Lead us to the Light, Op. Cit. p. 9

¹⁴ Ibid. p. 60

According to her, despite the fact that in the traditional caste society a Brahmin was a Brahmin by mere birth, in the new society, a Brahmin should be one who is known by his deed (action). Amma stresses that by serving the world you basically battle the negativities within you, such as the ego and selfishness. That is indeed the true meaning of the Mahabharata War and it is understandable why Lord Krishna asked Arjuna to fight the War, i.e., for the sake of Dharma.¹⁵

Amma believes that people should “live by the principle of Vedanta”: Today most people limit Vedanta to mere words. We don’t see any Vedanta reflected in their actions. Vedanta is not a load to be carried around; it is a principle to be brought into the heart and practised by the mind”.¹⁶ One of Amma’s main suggestions to people living in the modern world is to “balance the spiritual and worldly life”. By understanding the intense pressures of work and the modern life style, Amma knows very well that it is impractical to ask people to deny themselves any kind of pleasure. At best what she can do is to request them to recognize their “real nature” and put emphasis on “nothing should be done in excess” because “the reason for all this evil we see in the world today is the total misconception that happiness can be found externally.”¹⁷

The Non-Brahmin model

A considerable amount of religious tolerance has always prevailed among the different sects within Hinduism and this has always been the corner stone of Kerala culture. Against this background, the promotion of the Math by an uneducated female Guru has been comparatively easy to accept as a non-Brahmin model. From a historical perspective, the Brahmins’ domination of the Dravidian south had already been challenged since the 19th century. The agitation against Brahmanical domination was in fact transformed by Swami Narayana Guru (1856-1928) into a socio-religious movement. Another noteworthy thing is that Kerala is a state “about women and nature”. Kerala’s

¹⁵ Ibid. pp. 46-47

¹⁶ Ibid. p. 58

¹⁷ Ibid. pp. 13-14

women have become doctors, pilots, Supreme Court judges, diplomats; they have excelled in sports, politics, are members of the armed forces etc. Thus Amma's emergence as an enlightened religious figure does not seem extraordinary.

Amma's explanations of Hindu concepts may sound very traditional, yet, the emphasis on action and service shows the continuity of reforms in the non-Brahmin tradition within Hinduism. While the "lesser form" of spirituality is still a taboo among many orthodox Brahmins, nobody has seen the extent of the power of Amma's love - religion and hugging methodology uniting all people with divinity. The social programs and humanitarian activities, which are discussed in the following sections further reflect the logical development of the idea of "serve people to serve God" and the spirit of Vedanta.

The Math in a Social Context

Educational institutions and humanitarian activities are the two pillars of Amma's social program. From the first school and a branch Ashram in Kondungallur, Kerala in 1987 to date, Amma has opened many schools, training centres and colleges (offering courses in the industrial sciences, computer technology, engineering, business, pharmaceutical sciences). The fastest development in the educational institutions took place in 2003. In that year, the government conferred 'Deemed-to-be-University' status on Amma's institutions of higher learning. The Mission opened the School of Medicine and Nursing, the School of Engineering, the School of Dentistry, the School of Science and Management and the School of Journalism. In 2004, the Biomedical Research Centre, Amrita Research Laboratories, and the Amrita Ayurvedic Medical College, Hospital and Research were established. The Teachers' Training College in Mysore was inaugurated in 2005.

In the educational institutions, the emphasis has been on contemporary subjects, especially business management, commerce, computer, medicine and biomedical research. In order to avoid "personal gain as the only goal in business", Amma guides her students to take into account "the progress of the country". Amma considers that "the aim of education and of securing a job should be our spiritual

development and service to the world".¹⁸ Today, Amrita's advertisement, entitled "An Emerging World Class University in India", which contains recent initiatives from e-learning network, biomedical technology, telematics, research laboratories, and autonomous Bio-inspired robots to network village resources, Ayurveda, Arts and Journalism, appears repeatedly in Indian newspapers and magazines. The universities promise "a unique and holistic experience", which includes "a strong cutting-edge technology orientation" and "the spirit of unity and reverence for all life forms."¹⁹

Amma's humanitarian activity is an extension of her idea of "serve people to serve God". She often says that serving the poor is our supreme duty to God. As a guru from the bottom, "Mother learned firsthand, right from childhood, the meaning of hardship. ...Mother would like to urge her wealthy children to be compassionate and serve the poor and the suffering."²⁰ Having once lived as a servant in her own family, Amma is sure that "God is far more pleased when He sees a poor person being helped and comforted than when millions are spent on an ostentatious religious festival".²¹

Amrita's humanitarian activities can be divided roughly into two kinds — healthcare and disaster relief. These activities started in 1989 when the Ashram saved a dilapidated orphanage and school in Kerala. The larger humanitarian activities began when the Amrita Kripa Hospital for cancer patients and the Kuteeram Project that will build 25,000 free houses were launched in 1996. Like the educational institutions, Amrita's humanitarian activities also went on fast track in the new century. The Amrita Kripa Aids Care Home, the Amrita Kripa Neeti Pratishtan (Free Legal Aid Forum), the first free wedding ceremonies for the poor, adult education centres, and the Care Home for the Elderly were inaugurated in 2003. In 2004, over 25,000 inpatients received free or reduced-fee treatment.

¹⁸ Ibid. p. 104

¹⁹ See the Advertisement of Amrita, Frontline, 15 July 2005, p.113.

²⁰ Sri Mata Amritanandamayi, 2001: Op. Cit. p. 54

²¹ Ibid. p. 39

The Amrita Tsunami Disaster Aid Fund of US\$ 23.3 million was announced immediately after the tsunami struck Amritapuri and the neighbouring coastal villages on 26 December 2004. The Ashram became the centre of relief operations and it proposed to rebuild all the houses that were destroyed by the tsunami in Kerala. In addition, it took up reconstruction work in Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Pondicherry and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Amma's relief program went beyond the border to Sri Lanka.

Math in Social Development

Mata Amritanandamayi's social contribution to Kerala and other parts of the country has been enormous. Amma's math has created transient, huge and unforgettable modern hospitals and colleges. The main concern for the development of religious organizations like Amma's math is the healthy growth of such a mission in a secular state. The process that the government uses to aid religious institutions such as temples, maths, wakfs, schools, libraries and so forth, stems from the theory of secularism which treats all religions equally.

Amma's organization seems to have the power to promote social stability as a direct result of its control of resources, interpersonal relationships, communication and expertise. Its resources include control over goods and services, organizational capability, social networks that are community based but at the same time global in scope, various types of agendas and programs. It has been deeply involved in children's education and the training of future generations.

The Math in Global context

From the very beginning the Math has been an international Mission. As more and more people started to recognize Amma as a living saint, a sizeable number of foreigners also came to participate in the management and spread of the Mission. Through them Amma learnt skills in the western system of management, including tax-deduction methods and social service activities.²² Swami Paratmananda, who was born in the USA, has been a senior disciple of Amma since he

²² Ibid. p. 65

settled in her Ashram in 1980. However, in 1990 he became the monk-charge at the Mata Amritanandamayi Center in San Ramon, California.²³ Now the Ashram has branches not only in various Indian cities but also in the US as well as several Asian and European countries.

In recent years, Amma has been travelling “for nearly eight months of the year meeting her ‘children’ in all corners of the globe and individually blessing them”.²⁴ The way she receives people by hugging is beyond comparison and has never been experienced by the Western world. People express their feelings by saying: “We have seen Christ! In mother, and in her divine love and compassion, we have seen Christ, the Lord!” In 1999, *The Japan Times* carried a story by Angela Jeffs who was covering at length Mata Amritanandamayi’s visit to Japan from 28 May to 31 May. She was said to have hugged 20,000 people in a single session. During her next visit to Japan in July 2003, the English daily *Herald Tribune* carried a front-page report and emphasized that “if there were a world record for hugs, it would surely go to Mata Amritanandamayi”. In countries where Hinduism is not a main religion, Amma’s programs are either held in the homes of Amma’s devotees or in different halls and churches. The *Devi Bhavas*, however, takes place in the living rooms of the devotees.²⁵

Amma has been a keynote speaker in various international forums since 1993. In that particular year she addressed the gathering at the 100th Anniversary of the Parliament of World Religions in Chicago by beginning with “May your hearts blossom”. The main addresses she has delivered in international forums are published on time and widely distributed.²⁶ In 2002, she won the Gandhi-King Award for Non-

²³ Swami Paratmananda. *On The Road to Freedom, A Pilgrimage in India*. India: Mata Amritanandamayi Mission Trust, 2000.

²⁴ *My first Darshan: A Collection of Stories from around the World*. 2 vols. India: Mata Amritanandamayi Mission Trust, 2003, p. 9.

²⁵ Swami Amritaswarupananda Puri. *Awaken Children-Dialogues with the Holy Mother*. India: Mata Amritanandamayi Mission Trust, 9 vols. Published from 1989 (Vol.1) to 2003 (Vol.9), 1989-2003, p. 12

²⁶ The addresses include “Living in Harmony”, an address at the Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders at the UN General Assembly in 2000; “Awakening Universal Motherhood” at a Global Peace Initiative of Women

Violence, a prestigious award of which the earlier recipients were former South African President Nelson Mandela and the UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan.

The iconic image of Amma at the international forums brings her to the center of today's pressing issues such as religious conflicts. Amma always gives simple answers to the complex questions, showing a village girl's simplicity and wisdom. Amma teaches people to reach out to the deeper value, not to be stopped by the apparent difference because fanaticism flourishes when religious concepts are put before human values. All her addresses focus on the great need for love and compassion in today's world: "The language of religion is the language of love. Today we know only limited selfish love. Transformation of this limited love into Divine Love is the goal of religion."

The BBC, PBS and other news media interviewed Amma during the Millennium World Peace Summit at the UN General Assembly in 2000. She emphasized the need for a forum of spiritual and religious leaders to discuss, formulate and implement spiritual solutions for the existing conflicts in society. For Amma, today's problem is that there are thousands who are ready to die for their religion, but there is none who is willing to live by its principles. People do not realize that religion is a way of life.

Challenges in the International Stage

In Amma's opinion, the fundamental problem, the root of all problems everywhere in the world, is one and the same: "That is ignorance, ignorance about the *Atman* (Self), about our essential nature. Too much concern about physical security and too little concern about spiritual security is the hallmark of today's world. This focus should change".²⁷ The first problem Amma has to deal with is how to address the problem of conversion. Commenting on religious bigotry, Amma notes, "the problem arises when we say our religion is right, yours is wrong!" Amma stresses that instead of trying to increase the number of

Religious Leaders at the UN, Geneva in 2002 and "May peace and happiness prevail" at the Parliament of World's Religions in Barcelona in 2004.

²⁷ Swami Amritaswarupananda: *Amma's Heart*, 2004 Op. Cit. p. 164

followers, religions should create an environment in which one may wisely accept the noble ideals of any religion because “the goal of all religions is one, purification of the human mind.”

Evidently, Amma has only one instrument for conversion and that is love. Amma’s ‘children’ come from different countries across five continents. The message of love is the only means by which she enlarges their number and unites her devotees, from old to young, belonging to different religions (Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims and Christians). The message that she sends to her devotees and religious leaders around the world signifies the commitment of her mission even while she tackles the challenges at the international level: “Let love, peace, cooperation and non-violence be the beacons that light the way into the twenty-first century.”

Conclusion

The findings suggest that Amma’s success is due to the fact that she has set up a *spiritual supermarket* for all which provides different products for different people. For instance, the Math provides a Hindu way of worship to the traditional Hindus so that in the eyes of the Hindus, Amma remains a true devotee, a perfect person and an unsurpassed *Karma Yogin*.

The Math also makes Hindu concepts accessible to westerners. It is not difficult to find what westerners need from an open-minded Hindu Guru. The positive mixture of religious and cultural tolerance, the coexistence of different ideologies, the long history of Western education and social reform as well as the service tradition of Kerala Gurus have been the positive contributing factors to Amma’s popularity. However, some of Amma’s ideas, especially the one of birth control, are against traditional Hindu ideas.²⁸

One of the reasons why Amma is successful is that “her social contribution to Kerala and India has been great”. Amma and Sri Narayana Guru share the view that education would pave the way for

²⁸ *Immoral Light: Advice to Householders*. India: Mata Amritanadamayi Mission Trust, 2001, p. 10, 100

the social and economic advancement of the people. The educational institutions and humanitarian programs, most of which have been established in the last decade, reflect a shift in the Ashram's approach from *sadhana* (penance) to service, though inmates insist these are but two sides of the same coin.

New age needs new guru with new style. There was always a secular component in India's culture, and it was through the constant interplay between the secular and the spiritual that the system was able to adapt itself to changing situations. Amma's adjustment has been way ahead of that of political leaders as can be seen in the wide-ranging programs that include even free legal aid. The growth of new religious movements in India also needs to be understood by taking into account the role and impact of religion in the life of the modern and educated middle class. Amma's spiritual service towards the middle class is aimed at balancing life which has been working well when "the preoccupation with religion and religious concerns - the reason of the absence, in recent times, of a strong ideological anchor in the secular realm - has increased and not diminished in the urban middle class after the Babri Masjid vandalism".²⁹

Amma does not see spirituality as a separate entity. It is an integral part of life. In a multi-religious society or in the international stage, Amma has to put human values - those social and ethical norms common to all cultures and religions and which represent a melding of social progress and spiritual growth - before religious concepts. She knows that in order to awaken unity and to spread love there must be respect for diversity. One must also listen to others with an open heart. She asks people not only to deepen the roots and broaden the vision, but also to progress in modern thinking while continuing to value their ancient traditions.

In fact, the values such as tolerance and love that Amma advocates are secular values. In the international stage, Amma has carefully put human values before religious concepts so that people will realize that

²⁹ Varma, Pavan K. *The Great Indian Middle Class*. New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 1999.

“the principles that Amma teaches can be applied in all countries”.³⁰ Even the overseas Hindus who returned to India found that “her message is simple and is the same as that of all great religions, to love and to serve others selflessly, seeing ourselves in them. Amma teaches that selfless service is an important part of spiritual practice”.³¹

To sum up, Amma’s life, from being an illiterate child with strange spiritual experiences to becoming a global guru who presides over an empire of charities and straddles the material and the spiritual worlds, testifies that only the gurus who address the issues people face can be successful in the increasingly competitive religious market. Amma along with her mission has made significant contributions to society by paying more attention to religious values than religious rituals and symbols, by re-explaining religious concepts in a way that suits the new age and the newly emerged social conditions, and by demonstrating universal values through social programs and social services.

³⁰ Ousokainen: *Embracing the world for peace and harmony*. India: Mata Amritanadamayi Math, 2005.

³¹ *My First Darshan*, 2003: Op. Cit. p. 3

Bediuzzaman Said Nursi and the Nur Movement

Leo D. Lefebure

The article surveys the impact of Said Nursi and the Nur Movement on Muslims across the globe. **Dr. Leo D Lefebure** (ll253@georgetown.edu) is Professor and Matteo Ricci Chair in the Department of Theology, Georgetown University, Washington DC. He has published his latest in 2013 *True and Holy: Christian Scripture and Other Religions*. And he co-authored with Peter Feldmeier the book *The Path of Wisdom: A Christian Commentary on the Dhammapada*, published by Eerdmans Publishing Company and Peeters in 2011.

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries profoundly transformed the Islamic world, posing many unprecedented challenges to Muslims and the traditional practice of Islam. In response to a rapidly changing world, many Muslims in the nineteenth century launched movements that sought in various ways to reform or revive the practice of Islam.¹ The dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and the end of the caliphate after World War I ushered in a radically different period of history for Muslims in the newly formed Republic of Turkey and other regions of the Middle East. Said Nursi (ca. 1877-1960) was one of the most active intellectual, political, religious, and military leaders during the end of the Ottoman Empire. After serving as a military leader in World War I, Nursi went through a personal crisis and transformation from

Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1982); Fazlur Rahman, *Revival and Reform in Islam: A Study of Islamic Fundamentalism*, ed. Ebrahim Moosa (Oxford: Oneworld, 2000).

“the old Said” to “the new Said”; he withdrew from active political and military leadership but continued to be a spiritual guide for many Muslims.

Through his personal example and his teachings, Nursi offered a model for resisting the secularizing initiatives of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and practicing Islam in a changed situation. Despite tensions with the government of the new Republic of Turkey, Nursi dictated the writings that became the *Risale-I Nur* and that launched the Nur movement in which Nursi saw himself as a participant. His courageous witness and his interpretations of the Holy Qur'an have become a model for many Muslims on how to engage modern culture and society, how to respond to modern science, and how to relate to Jews, Christians, and followers of other religious paths. In recent years the Istanbul Foundation for Science and Culture, which was founded in 1979, has sponsored a number of major international conferences focusing on the heritage of Nursi. Another major initiative is the worldwide Hizmet Movement, which is inspired by the Turkish Islamic leader Fethullah Gülen, and which also continues to explore and develop the legacy of Nursi. Followers of the Nur movement frequently reach out to Jews, Christians, and followers of other religious paths for partnership in shaping a better world. While there are significant areas where Christians can agree with the values and concerns of Nursi, it is important to recognize that there are also important differences, including Nursi's expression at times of a triumphalistic hope for the victory of Islam over all other religious traditions.

The Early Life of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi

Said Nursi was born in a Kurdish farming family in the village of Nurs in the eastern part of present-day Turkey in or around the year 1877. His father was known as Sufi Murza, indicating his following of the Sufi path. As a young man, Nursi learned the Islamic tradition so intensely and interpreted it with such skill that an Islamic scholar, Molla Fethullah Efendi, bestowed on him the accolade “Bediuzzaman” (“Wonder of the World”) because of his prodigious learning and memory.² His early training provided him with guidance for the rest

² Sükran Vahide, *Islam in Modern Turkey: An Intellectual Biography of Bediuzzaman*

of his life. Nursi later looked back on his parents, commenting, "From my mother I learnt compassion, and from my father orderliness and regularity."³ He would go on to become known better than any of his early teachers.

Muslims in Ottoman Empire in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries faced multiple challenges regarding modern science, political reform, relations to other religions, and the proper interpretation and practice of Islam. During this period modern science entered Ottoman society enveloped in the philosophical interpretation of Auguste Comte, who maintained that science had definitively discredited and replaced all earlier religious and metaphysical beliefs.⁴ Rejecting any form of religion or metaphysics, Comte looked forward to the complete triumph of modern reason in the form of his version of scientific knowledge, which he called "positivism." At the same time Protestant missionaries had come to the Ottoman Empire and established schools that promoted knowledge both of modern science and also of the Christian faith. Aware of this double challenge from secularists and Christians, Nursi was concerned that at this time the traditional Islamic schools, the *medreses*, in the Ottoman Empire, avoided all study of modern science, resulting in a widespread conviction that Islam and modern science were in contradiction.

In response, Nursi vigorously challenged the claims of positivism, denying that there is any conflict in principle between scientific understanding and religious faith. He insisted that Muslims needed to study both modern science and the Islamic tradition in relation to each other.⁵ To accomplish this goal, Nursi hoped to establish a new university

Said Nursi, ed. Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi' (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2005), 13.

³ Vahide, *Islam in Modern Turkey*, 4.

⁴ Auguste Comte, *Auguste Comte and Positivism: The Essential Writings* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983); Mary Pickering, *Auguste Comte: An Intellectual Biography* (Cambridge, England and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

⁵ On Nursi's understanding of modernity, see Durmus Hocaoglu, "Islam and Modernity," in *Globalization, Ethics and Islam: the Case of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi*, ed. Ian Markham and Ibrahim Ozdemir (Aldershot, England and Burlington, VT:

in eastern Anatolia that would combine traditional Islamic studies including Sufi learning, and modern science.⁶ While his project was never to be realized, his hope for the harmonious study of both the Islamic heritage and modern science lives on as an example and challenge for today's Muslims, including both the Istanbul Foundation for Science and Culture and the Hizmet movement.

Before World War I, Nursi was deeply involved with political issues including the debates over a constitution for the Ottoman Empire and the place of religious minorities in the political order. He became involved in the struggle of the so-called "young Turks" for constitutional reform, and he argued that Islam called for political rights and freedom as the key to progress. Nursi collaborated with the leaders of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) for a time, but he became disenchanted with them and later opposed their initiatives.⁷ While he strongly endorsed the official Islamic character of the Ottoman Empire, Nursi also supported right of Jews and Christians to participate in leadership positions such as governor.⁸ While the details of his political statements reflect the specific context of his time, later Muslims would look to his principles as precedents for supporting constitutional reforms and acknowledging minority rights to religious freedom in other contexts around the world.

In 1911 Nursi came to a position of greater prominence when he was invited to deliver a sermon in the historic Umayyad Mosque in Damascus, one of the most prestigious venues in the Islamic world. He addressed an assembly of about 10,000 persons, including about

Ashgate, 2005), 174-194; on Nursi's understanding of science, see Alparslan Acikgenc, "The Conception of Science in the *Risale-i Nur*," in *Fifth International Symposium on Bediuzzaman Said Nursi: The Qur'anic View of Man, According to the Risale-i Nur*, trans. Sükran Vahide (Istanbul: Sozler, 2002), 333-340.

⁶ See M. Sait Ozervarli, "Said Nursi's Project of Revitalizing Contemporary Islamic Thought," in *Islam at the Crossroads: On the Life and Thought of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi*, ed. Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi' (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2003), 317-333.

⁷ Vahide, *Islam in Modern Turkey*, 36-37.

⁸ Sükran Vahide, *Bediuzzaman Said Nursi: The Author of the Risale-i Nur* (Istanbul: Istanbul Ofset Basim, 1992), 89-91.

one hundred distinguished scholars. Decades later, in the 1950s Nursi translated the sermon into Turkish, added further comments to it, and included it in the *Risale-i-Nur*. It has circulated widely in this later form; in his Damascus Sermon, Nursi noted a number of obstacles to the practice of Islam, including “[t]he Europeans’ ignorance, their barbarity at that time, and their bigotry in their religion.”⁹ He lamented that despair had weakened the practice of Islam: “Despair is a most grievous sickness and it has entered the heart of the world of Islam.”¹⁰ Nonetheless, Nursi hoped that the obstacles were in the process of being dispersed by the virtues of knowledge and civilization. He expressed great hope for the future triumph of Islam: “*Europe and America are pregnant with Islam; one day they will give birth to an Islamic state. Just as the ottomans were pregnant with Europe and gave birth to a European state.*”¹¹ He asserted that “it is Islam that will be the true, and spiritual, ruler over the future, and only Islam that will lead mankind to happiness in this world and the next; and that true Christianity, stripping off superstition and corrupted belief, will be transformed into Islam.”¹² He lamented the divisions among Muslims and accused many of laziness.

World War I and Personal Crisis

During World War I, Nursi served for about two years as the regimental commander of a volunteer militia in the Ottoman Empire. When civilian Armenian Christians were in danger, he used his authority to protect those in his area. He eventually was captured by the Russian army in March 1916, and spent about two years as a prisoner of war in Russia. The Allied victory had consequences for Muslim life. The defeat of the Ottoman Empire led to its dismemberment by European powers and its final dissolution. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk abolished both the sultanate and the caliphate, closed the traditional *medreses*, and founded the modern Republic of Turkey as a secular state. The concrete

⁹ Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, *The Damascus Sermon*, trans. Sükran Vahide (Istanbul: Sözler Nesriyat, 2001), 32.

¹⁰ Nursi, *Damascus Sermon*, 43.

¹¹ Nursi, *Damascus Sermon*, 35.

¹² Nursi, *Damascus Sermon*, 35-36.

governmental structures that Nursi had worked to reform were no more. Atatürk and his colleagues wanted the new secular Turkish Republic to be radically different from the Ottoman heritage, and before long they were severely restricting the range of religious activity.

During 1920 and 1921, in the wake of the widespread devastation caused by World War I and amid the general crisis of the end of the Ottoman Empire, Nursi went through a personal crisis centering on "the contemplation of death."¹³ He withdrew from his usual routines in order to seek spiritual wisdom. This quest eventually led to a deep transformation marking the end of one period of his life and the beginning of a new stage. Nursi later looked back on this period as a "spiritual storm":

At a time this poor Said was trying to emerge from the Old Said, his intellect and heart were floundering among truths in a terrible spiritual storm resulting from lack of a guide and the pride of his evil-commanding soul. . . . And when, at the time on that spiritual journeying I saw myself under awesome pressure overwhelmed by truly burdensome loads, I followed the matters of the Practices [of the Prophet (PBUH)] touching on that situation, I experienced a lightness as though all my burdens were being lifted from me. Through submitting to them, I was saved from doubts and scruples, that is, from anxieties like: 'Is such a course of action right, is it beneficial, I wonder?' Whenever I drew back my hand, I looked and saw that the pressure was intense. . . . The load was heavy, and I was utterly powerless. My view was short, and the way, dark. Whenever I adhered to the Practices of the Prophet (PBUH), the way was lit up and seen to be safe.¹⁴

In particular Nursi had to confront the ominous inevitability of death: "At one time, I saw myself in a strange world resulting from a state of

¹³ Sükran Vahide, "Toward an Intellectual Biography of Said Nursi." *Islam at the Crossroads: On the Life and Thought of Bediüzzaman Said Nursi*, ed. Ibrahim Abu-Rabi' (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2003), 10.

¹⁴ Bediüzzaman Said Nursi, *The Flashes Collection*, trans. Sükran Vahide (Istanbul: Reyhan Ofset A.S., 2000), 81, 82.

mind produced by contemplating death and affirming the propositions 'Death is a reality,' and from the transience and passing of the world, I saw myself as a corpse standing at the head of three huge corpses."¹⁵ On his own, he could find no way out of the crisis, but he turned to a verse from the Qur'an that gave him hope: "But if they turn away, say: 'God suffices me, there is no god but He; in Him do I place my trust - He the Sustainer of the Throne [of Glory] Supreme!'"¹⁶ This verse became for Nursi "like a safe and trusty boat," in which he could safely find refuge: "Say: Almighty God suffices me. Since He exists, everything exists. So those who have departed have not gone to non-existence; they have departed for another of His realms."¹⁷ The promise of the resurrection gave Nursi renewed confidence. His biographer, Sükran Vahide, describes the significance of this transformation for his later work: "His contemplation of death set him off on an inner journey or spiritual quest that he depicted as a journey through the earth."¹⁸ He never again accepted any active role in government or military activity, rejecting an invitation from Atatürk to participate in the new government of the Republic of Turkey.

The Birth of the Nur Movement

In response to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's efforts to secularize Turkey by removing Islamic influence from the public sphere, Nursi consistently defended the Islamic heritage of Turkish society.¹⁹ Even though he repeatedly refused to support armed insurrections against the Kemalist government, the ruling party deeply distrusted him and resented his influence. In this highly charged context, Nursi sought to explain fundamental Islamic beliefs to the ordinary faithful and thereby launched what would later be called the Nur movement. Nursi dictated writings that would be collected in the multi-volume *Risale-i Nur* ("Letters of

¹⁵ Nursi, *Flashes*, 82.

¹⁶ Nursi, *Flashes*, 83.

¹⁷ Nursi, *Flashes*, 83.

¹⁸ Vahide, "Toward an Intellectual Biography of Said Nursi," 10.

¹⁹ On the conflict between Nursi and the Turkish Republic, see Camilla T. Nereid, *In the Light of Said Nursi: Turkish Nationalism and the Religious Alternative*, Bergen Studies on the Middle East and Africa 4 (Bergen, Norway: Centre for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, 1997), 55-80.

Light"). Ironically, the Turkish government decision to exile him to Barla, a remote, mountainous village, would provide him with eight and a half years in which he could pray, reflect, and dictate writings on the Qur'an to his students. Nursi later looked back on his exile by the Turkish government as a time of blessing from God. Nursi viewed the texts he was dictating not as his own personal creation but rather as coming through him from beyond.

Nursi's disciples carefully copied his comments even when it was illegal to do so, risking arrest and imprisonment. Government prosecutors repeatedly arraigned Nursi in courts, and he spent much time under house arrest and some time in jail because of his fearless witness to his faith. His eloquence in the courtroom proved to be an embarrassment to his prosecutors. When the government transferred him to another region of the country, the same process was repeated, and his writings gained him even more followers in another area.

According to Serif Mardin, the audience of Nursi "seems to have consisted primarily of persons from the provincial periphery who were seeking a means of coming to terms with the disenchantment of the world, and who had a perception of the new world, even though through the prism of their provincial Muslim culture."²⁰ Nursi's eloquence and courage inspired countless followers both during his lifetime and after. Eventually, in the 1950s, the Turkish government relaxed the restrictions on Nursi, and he continued to dictate the writings of the *Risale-i Nur*. In the changed political climate, he refrained from any direct political activity, and he did not want his followers to be directly involved in politics. Nonetheless, he was aware of the important implications of religious principles for political life. During this period Nursi had some contact with Christian leaders. In 1950 Nursi gave permission to Selahaddin Celebi to send some of his writings to Pope Pius XII, and Nursi received a hand-written note of thanks in response, dated 22 February 1951.²¹ In 1953 Nursi visited the Greek Orthodox Ecumenical

²⁰ Serif Mardin, *Religion and Social Change in Modern Turkey: The Case of Bediüzzaman Said Nursi*, SUNY Series in Near Eastern Studies (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1989), 37.

²¹ Vahide, *Nursi*, 343-44; idem, *Islam in Modern Turkey*, 316.

Patriarch Athenagoras in Istanbul, hoping for greater cooperation between Christians and Muslims.

Nursi's Theological Perspectives: Creation and Revelation

The basis for Nursi's view of the world and other religions lies in his twofold theology based on the knowledge of God offered by creation and by revelation through prophets. In light of the Qur'an (2:31), Said Nursi saw humans as created like Adam with a God-given knowledge of the names of creation.²² Nursi saw this as a divinely given basis for exploring the universe in science and technology: "Thus, with this verse, the All-Wise Qur'an strikes the hand of encouragement on man's back, urging him to the highest peaks, the furthest limits, the final degrees, which he is far behind at the present degree of his progress."²³ For Nursi, the human person is a microcosm of creation.²⁴ Nursi interpreted the human ability to name all of creation as a sign of God's special gift to humans.

For Nursi, the pursuits of modern science can be a way of developing the knowledge of the names that was given to Adam, or science can be a new form of self-assertion and idolatry. For Nursi, if humans abuse science as a weapon of power and domination, an instrument of conquest, then in this form science is not fully rational because its use is based on an underlying rejection of its origin and goal, which is God. If, however, humans dedicate their scientific pursuits to the service of the infinite mystery that surrounds them, then science can become a form of love and can greatly enhance human life and give glory to God.

²² See Fuzil, "The Concept of Knowledge," 152.

²³ Nursi, *The Words*, 271; see also 'Abd al-'Aziz Barghuth, "The Place of the Theory of Knowledge in the Vicegerency and Civilizational Process in the Thought of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi," in *Fourth International Symposium on Bediuzzaman Said Nursi: A Contemporary Approach to Understanding the Qur'an: The Example of the Risale-I Nur*, trans. Sükran Vahide (Istanbul: sozler,2000), 27-31.

²⁴ George Grigore, "Man as Microcosm. According to the *Risale-I Nur* of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi," in *Fifth International Symposium on Bediuzzaman Said Nursi: The Qur'anic View of Man, According to the Risale-I Nur*, trans. Sükran Vahide (Istanbul: Sozler, 2002), 71-75.

To guide the dialogue with modern science, Nursi reaffirmed to the traditional Islamic belief that humans can in principle know God as creator from the goodness and beauty of creation.²⁵ He comments: "Everything becomes a mirror yielding knowledge of God. As Sa'di Shirazi said: '*To the conscious gaze each leaf is a book telling of Divine knowledge.*' In everything a window opens up onto knowledge of God."²⁶ For Nursi, the entire universe is a book that reveals the power and wisdom of God to those who know how to read it.²⁷ Thus he held that there is no contradiction between practicing Islam and studying science.

Said Nursi related the teachings of the Holy Qur'an to the Book of the Universe, maintaining that the message of all the prophets builds on the knowledge of God offered by creation.²⁸ Nursi, following the Islamic tradition, held that God has sent prophets to all peoples and thus divine revelation has been offered to all humans. According to Nursi, the line of prophethood and religion extends throughout all of human history; he praised the union of prophecy with philosophy in the highest possible terms:

Whenever those two lines have been in agreement and united, that is to say if the line of philosophy, having joined the line of religion, has been obedient and of service to it, the world of humanity has experienced a brilliant happiness and social life. Whereas, when they have become separated, goodness and light have been drawn to the side of the line of prophethood and religion, and evil and misguidance to the side of the line of philosophy.²⁹

²⁵ Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, *The Rays Collection From the Risale-I Nur Collection* 4, trans. Sükran Vahide (Istanbul: Sozler, 2002), 130-171.

²⁶ Nursi, *Letters*, 389.

²⁷ Sükran Vahide, "The Book of the Universe: Its Place and Development in Bediuzzaman's Thought," in *Fourth International Symposium on Bediuzzaman Said Nursi: A Contemporary Approach to Understanding the Qur'an: The Example of the Risale-I Nur*, trans. Sükran Vahide (Istanbul: Sozler Publications, 2000), 466-83.

²⁸ Sami 'Afifi Hijazi, "Bediuzzaman Said Nursi's Ideas on the Qur'an and the Book of the Universe," in *A Contemporary Approach to Understanding the Qur'an: The Example of the Risale-i Nur: Fourth International Symposium on Bediuzzaman Said Nursi* (Istanbul: Sözlür Nesriyat Ticaret ve Sanayi, 2000), 439-452.

²⁹ Said Nursi, *The Words: On the Nature and Purposes of Man, Life, and All Things*, *Risale-I Nur Collection*, 1, trans. Sükran Vahide (rev. ed.; Istanbul: Teyhan Ofset, A.S., 2002), 561.

Nursi starkly warns that if the human ego separates itself from God and believes it owns itself, it is "in absolute ignorance" even if it knows all the branches of human science.³⁰

Like the earlier Islamic tradition, Nursi stresses the close link and fundamental unity between the revelation given in the Qur'an and in earlier prophets:

One wing of the Qur'an is in the past, and one is in the future, and just as its roots and one wing are the agreed truths of the former prophets, and it confirms and corroborates them, and they too confirm it with the tongue of unanimity, so too all the true sufi paths and the ways of sainthood whose fruits, the saints and purified scholars, who receive life from the Qur'an, show through their vital spiritual progress that their blessed tree is living, effulgent, and the means to truth.³¹

Nursi was aware of the challenge to faith in God posed by the injustices so frequently suffered in history. In response to this challenge, Nursi often expressed his views in rhetorical questions that imply only one response is reasonable: "Now is it at all possible that the justice and wisdom that hasten to relieve the pettiest need of the smallest of creation should fail to provide immortality, the greatest need of man, the greatest of creatures? That it should fail to respond to his greatest plea and cry for assistance? Or that it should not preserve the dignity of God's dominicality by preserving the rights of His servants?"³²

Now is it at all possible that an All-Wise and All-Preserving Being, who does not neglect the most banal doings of the lowest of his subjects should not record the most significant deeds of the greatest among his subjects, should not call them to account, should not reward and punish them? After all, it is those foremost among his subjects that perform deeds offensive to his glory, contrary to his pride and unacceptable to his compassion, and those deeds remain unpunished in this world. It must be, therefore, that their judgement is postponed to a Supreme Court.³³

³⁰ Nursi, *Words*, 560.

³¹ Nursi, *Words*, 461-62.

³² Nursi, *Words*, 78.

³³ Nursi, *Words*, 64.

Nursi's faith in the resurrection of the dead provided him with the answer to the questions of theodicy. Nursi frequently uses the words "prove" and "proof" regarding this teaching, and his followers sometimes praise him for his accomplishments in this regard. For example, he claims that events in the life of the prophet Muhammad "prove" the teaching of the resurrection: "All the miracles indicating the Messengership of Muhammad (Peace and blessings be upon him) and the evidences for his prophethood, and all the proofs of his veracity, together testify to the occurrence of the resurrection and prove it. For after the Divine unity, everything he claimed throughout his life was centred on the resurrection of the dead."³⁴ However, Nursi does not offer the type of philosophical, metaphysical reasoning that is usually designated "proof" in Western philosophy and Christian systematic theology. The use of the term "proof" suggests a type of argumentation that is familiar to Western philosophical discourse but that is not actually used by Nursi.

The Nur Movement after the Death of Nursi

While Nursi influenced countless individuals through his witness and example, he left his principal legacy in the writings he dictated. This would shape the Nur movement after his death. Metin Karabasoglu comments: "Despite his charismatic personality, Nursi deliberately avoided forming a movement based on his personal charisma."³⁵ After the death of Nursi in 1960, the Nur movement fragmented into various groups without any central leadership. For the most part, the various groups have been harmonious to each other. One split occurred between those who wanted to print the writings of Nursi in Turkish for mass distribution and those who wanted to preserve the *Risale* in its original handwritten form in the Arabic script.

Two months after Nursi's death, the Turkish military launched a coup which made life more difficult for his followers. In the 1960s, Zübeyr Gündüzalp provided important leadership in maintaining the

³⁴ Nursi, *Words*, 111.

³⁵ Metin Karabasoglu, "Text and Community: An Analysis of the *Risale-i Nur* Movement," in *Islam at the Crossroads: On the Life and Thought of Bediüzzaman Said Nursi*, ed. Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi` (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2003), 279.

integrity of the movement, in stressing the authority of the text of the *Risale-i Nur*, and in allowing for a variety of interpretations of the text under the motto of “Unity within Diversity.”³⁶ In later years, some political movements in Turkey would variously oppose or draw upon the resources of the Nur movement. There were a number of divisions during the later 1970s, and the movement led by Fethullah Gülen eventually separated itself from others. Karabasoglu comments on the difference: “The growth of the Gülen group led some smaller groups within the *Nur* movement to seek an affiliation with it. However, in contradistinction to the *Nur* movement, the Gülen movement was person-centered and hierarchical, and gave priority to personal charisma over text.”³⁷

During the 1990s, the Nur movement translated virtually all of the *Risale-i Nur* into English and Arabic, paving the way for greater international engagement with the legacy of Nursi. At the same time, the various groups within the movement developed mutual respect for and acceptance of diverse viewpoints.

Conclusion

In 1979, eleven Turkish Muslim leaders organized the Istanbul Foundation for Science and Culture “to perform the mission of organizing cultural and academic activities for the welfare of humanity, supporting those who are active in the field, nationally and internationally. In this line the foundation has organized, directly, indirectly, or took part in several international symposiums and conferences on the life and thought of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, late Muslim thinker of Turkey.”³⁸ The Istanbul Foundation for Science and Culture promotes knowledge of the *Risale-i Nur* through major international conferences that assemble thousands of persons. Conferences have addressed topics such as: “The Reconstruction of Islamic Thought in the Twentieth Century and Bediuzzaman Said Nursi” (1995), “Bringing Faith, Meaning, and Peace to Life in a Multicultural World: The *Risale-i Nur*’s Approach” (2004), “The *Risale-i Nur*: Knowledge, Faith, Morality, and the Future of Humankind” (2010), and “Prophethood” (2013). This will give an idea of what this Foundation is.

³⁶ Karabasoglu, 279-80, 283.

³⁷ Karabasoglu, 285.

³⁸ <http://www.iikv.org/en/about-us/>; viewed November 20, 2014.

Catholic Tribal Movement

Agapit Tirkey

The article narrates the story of the *Christian tribals* and how they came to be politically a strong movement within their majority homeland states in the North and Northeast of India. **Dr. Agapit Tirkey, SJ** (agapit.tirkey@gmail.com), currently the Director of *Tribal Research and Documentation Centre* in Pathalgaon, Chhattisgarh State, obtained his Ph.D. degree in Sociology from Delhi School of Economics. He gives regular courses on Tribal movements, their culture, religion and philosophy. His recent book is on a Jesuit Fr. Constant Lievens, who worked for the tribals: *Servant of God Father Constant Lievens, S.J., 1856-1893: The Liberator of Tribals* (2014)

Introduction

From the outset, let it be clear that this paper covers only the Catholic tribals and their movements in the central zone of India. Covering all the Catholic tribals and their movements in the country is beyond its scope. In 1860, Mgr. Steins, the Catholic Vicar Apostolic, asked Father Stockman, S.J. to contact the Tribals of Chota Nagpur¹ and to try to establish a Catholic community among them. Accordingly, Father Stockman arrived at Chaibasa in 1869 among the Ho tribals. In 1873 some poor Munda tribal families came over to the Catholic mission and received instruction. Mgr. Steins himself baptised them in July of that year at Chaibasa on his way back home to Calcutta from a visit to Hazaribag. Father Constant Lievens on his arrival in 1885 at Ranchi, moved to the South-West in search of a suitable centre of operations.

¹ Chota Nagpur Division in British Raj comprising the present day Chota Nagpur in Jharkhand that extended to the adjoining districts in Chhattisgarh, Odisha and West Bengal.

He decided upon Torpa, a place of some importance, as it had a post office, a police station, a weekly market and was centrally situated in the Munda tribal country. The *Jamadar*² kindly gave the priest a small hut at the extremity of the police lines. Here, Father Lievens settled down for a pioneer work, mainly of study and preparation lasting till about the 1st March, 1886. It was about this date that the great movement of joining Catholicism by the tribals began.

Expansion of Catholic Faith

Barwe, a region then inhabited by 35,000 Kurukh speaking tribals (Uraons) was at a distance of about 90 to 120 miles to the West and South-West of Ranchi³. In the beginning of 1889, some Uraons from a village called Birri in Barwe had come to Ranchi for a law suit. They went to consult Father Lievens, who with his rich knowledge of the law, saw that they had a valid case, advised them and helped them to win the case. On their return to Barwe, they told their brethren not only of their victory at the court of law, but also of the new religion they had adopted. Soon there was a sensational stir in this section of the country and no less than 1,000 heads of families walked 100 miles to the *dera*⁴ of Father Lievens in order to receive instruction and baptism after which they returned home to instruct others in their turn. In September 1889, Fathers Lievens, Dehon and Cardon toured the Biru plateau about 400 square miles in area when 10,000 people inscribed themselves as neophytes⁵.

These large scale joining of the tribals to the Catholic Church had excited the envy and fear of the *zamindars* who foresaw that with the spread of Christianity and a better organisation of Christians, the Tribals would slip away from their power and oppression. In collusion with the local police they sent a joint petition to the civil authorities at Ranchi to hasten to their aid for, they said, the Catholic missionaries and their agents were fomenting an agitation, holding seditious gatherings and

² Head of the police station.

³ Capital city of Jharkhand

⁴ Hut

⁵ Ekka, P., *Tribal Movements: A Study In Social Change*, Kailash Paper Conversion Pvt. Ltd., Ranchi, 2003, pp. 139-140.

encouraging open rebellion among their converts. The Commissioner was alarmed. The Catholic missionaries and Father Lievens in particular were very careful to keep within strict legal limits and not to give any cause of complaint to the government, for their policy of procuring legal protection for their neophytes would be doomed to failure if they were to estrange the government. Father Lievens had himself issued very clear directives to new Catholics on their duties and rights under the British Government.

Chota Nagpur Unnati Samaj⁶ (CNUS)

In 1915, this society was sponsored by the Lutherans under the leadership of Rev. Juel Lakra, Lutheran Pastor and headmaster of the Lutheran High School, Ranchi. The aims of this organisation was (a) to uplift Chota Nagpur from its backward state, (b) to improve the social, political and economic conditions of the Tribals. The main slogan of this organisation was, 'if we want to hold our own in India, we must hang together or else we shall be hanged separately'⁷. In order to attain these aims the CNUS tried to procure a legal recognition of the Government for the village and *parha*⁸ organisations and for the village headmen and *parha mankis*⁹ and *rajas*. Through these traditional organisations it was hoped to bring about a perfect unity of purpose and action among the Tribals in their undertakings for social and moral uplift. The CNUS had the backing of all denominations, including Catholic tribals, and it was instrumental in the opening of new schools and grain co-operative stores in many parts of Chota Nagpur. By extending membership and participation to Christians of all denominations as well as to non-Christians belonging to different tribal groups in Chota Nagpur, the CNUS contributed towards an *inter-tribal* unity in the region. The constitutional reforms in the national panorama gave a spur to the *pan-tribal* sentiment and the CNUS raised a demand for reservation in services and legislative bodies and also for the *autonomy* of Chota Nagpur detached from Bihar.

⁶ Chota Nagpur Improvement Society

⁷ Tirkey, A., *Jharkhand Movement: A Study of its Dynamics*, Other Media Communications, New Delhi, 2002, p.56.

⁸ Inter-village

⁹ Chiefs

Demand for a Separate Tribal State

When the Simon Commission and Cripps Mission visited India in 1928, a delegation of the CNUS with a number of tribal Catholics met them and placed its grievances before them. The delegation pressed its demand for a separate state for the Tribals. Though this demand was not met, yet its impact was felt at the time of framing the constitutional reforms for India in 1935. Chota Nagpur was declared a *partially excluded area* under the special responsibility of the Governor. Under the Government of India Act of 1935, elections were held in January 1937. There were six tribal reserved seats for the Provincial Legislature in Jharkhand. All the reserved seats were captured by the Congress. However, Boniface Lakra and Ignace Beck, two prominent Catholics, contested election from the general seats and got elected. Ignace Beck became the member of the Federal Legislature in Delhi. His experience gradually sharpened his political skill. He dreamt of a *pan-tribal* organisation for the whole of Chota Nagpur in order to fight more effectively for the all round development of the entire tribal population of the region. It is important to point out here that Ignace Beck had undergone a serious Jesuit training in the disciplines of philosophy and theology before entering into his political career.¹⁰ He visualised that the Tribals needed to remove their denominational differences and stand united for their common cause. By doing so, they would attain freedom from their social, economic and political backwardness. He took initiative to approach different tribal organisations and their leaders in this regard and made them understand his view points.

Adibasi Mahasabha

On the initiative of Ignace Beck, different tribal organisations in the region of Chota Nagpur and Santal Pargana got united and formed into a single organisation called the *Chota Nagpur-Santal Pargana Adibasi Sabha* which was named *Adibasi Mahasabha*¹¹ (ABMS) in

¹⁰ Beck, I., *Political Awakening of Tribals In Jharkhand*, Sudhir Printers, New Delhi, 2002, p. 1.

¹¹ Tribal General Assembly

1938. Soon there came the municipal election in February 1938. In both the districts of Ranchi and Singhbhum, the nominees of the ABMS got elected in majority. Encouraged by this election result, the ABMS declared that it would serve as the only body to represent the interests of both the Christian and non-Christian Tribals of the region.

In the beginning of 1939, Jaipal Singh who was christened earlier Edward Horo¹², came over to Ranchi on his way to Patna. He was then the minister in the Bikaner princely state. The tribal leaders in Ranchi, requested him to preside over the meeting of the ABMS to be held that year and he accepted their invitation. In his address on January 20, 1939, he stressed that freedom from exploitation demanded that Chota Nagpur and Santal Pargana should become a state within India. This was an essential step towards self-reliance.

Jharkhand Party

Upto the late forties, the ABMS was confined to the Christian and non-Christian Tribals though on principle it was open to the *Sadaans* (non-tribals) who had settled in Jharkhand permanently. How to accommodate the non-Tribals in the ABMS and reconcile the controversy of the interests of the Tribals with the former posed a very serious challenge before the tribal leaders. It needed to be sorted out in order to make the Jharkhand demand stronger. To press this view-point further, Justin Richard, another tribal leader, organised the United Jharkhand Party in 1948. This brought about a new turn of event causing the members of the ABMS to introduce changes in its constitution as well as its objectives.

In the Jamshedpur session of the ABMS in 1949-50 (December-January), it was decided that the ABMS would extend its membership to the non-tribal residents of the region of Chota Nagpur and Santal Pargana and yet it would retain its *Tribal Identity*. After some initial hesitation, Jaipal Singh accepted the decision. In order to resolve the controversy, the ABMS was renamed as the *Jharkhand Party* in 1950. Jaipal Singh became its first president and Ignace Beck the general secretary. The tribal movement in the Jharkhand region thus got

¹² A Munda tribal

transformed into a party-based movement symbolising the aspirations and needs of the local people in the region.

General Election (1952)

Sukumar Sen, Election Commissioner, announced that general election would take place in the beginning of 1952. All the political parties in the country got busy in preparing for the very first election in free India. The Jharkhand Party was just beginning to learn how to undertake activities of party politics. The general election of 1952 marked the climax of the popularity of the Jharkhand Party. The size of the votes polled by it was 7,66,366 (COJM Report 1990.: 41). It has remained an all time record. There were 35 Scheduled Tribes reserved seats in Bihar. Out of these, 33 seats were located in Chotanagpur and Santal Pargana. The Jharkhand Party alone had won 25 out of the above seats. The party had also won 5 seats from the general and 2 seats from the Scheduled Castes reserved constituencies. Its performance in Orissa and Madhya Pradesh was far from satisfactory. By virtue of 32 seats in the Bihar State Assembly, the Jharkhand Party became the main opposition party. It won 5 seats in the Lok Sabha.

States Reorganisation Commission (SRC) (1953)

On December 18, 1952, the Union Cabinet decided that the state of Andhra would be formed and early in 1953 the state of Andhra was created. It was thus the first linguistic State of free India. After formation of the Andhra state, there was enough evidence of brewing trouble in Bombay and other places already. Observing this serious situation, the Government of India constituted the States Reorganisation Commission (SRC) on December 29, 1953.

The SRC visited the state of Bihar in the last week of January in 1955. Around 2-3 lakh of people in Dumka, Ranchi and Chaibasa respectively rent the sky with their slogan: "*Jharkhand Alag Prant!*" (Separate State of Jharkhand). Two separate memoranda were submitted to the SRC. The memorandum¹³ submitted by the Jharkhand Party members read as follows:

¹³ Sharma, A.P. 1988: "The Jharkhand Movement: A Critique." *Social Change*, 18(2), p.73

This memorandum is being submitted with a strong affirmation on moral, material and cultural grounds and for peace and good Government, that Jharkhand be reconsolidated and formed into a state comprising the division of Chotanagpur, the district of Santal Pargana, the former Chota Nagpur states ...

Ignace Beck, MP and Jharkhand Party General Secretary, submitted the second memorandum on behalf of the Jharkhand Legislature Party substantially with the same argument as above. However, he added a few more specific territories as parts of the proposed Jharkhand state.....¹⁴ It was argued that such a state formation would achieve more and surer internal and external unity and security of the Republic of India. The people of Jharkhand had a very strong desire for a clearer expression of their local individuality different from those of the plains. They were different in their origin, history, proclivities and land-tenure from the people of the plains. 'History has amply shown to prove', said the memorandum, 'that the Jharkhandis will never develop until Jharkhand is dissociated from Bihar and created a separate state'.¹⁵ The memorandum thus emphasised both the *regional* and *ethnic* aspects of the Jharkhand demand.

The SRC Report was published in June, 1956. It suggested formation of a number of new states as also increase or decrease of areas in certain states lying adjacent to one another by alteration of their boundaries. The SRC recommended a special development board for Chotanagpur and Santal Pargana that was not even remotely mentioned by the Jharkhand leaders. The SRC observed as follows:

Thirty three members of the local legislature from Chotanagpur Division and Santal Pargana have presented the case for the division of Bihar to the Commission, this representation being supported by other parties and organisations (Para 617). If the Chotanagpur Division and Santal Pargana are taken together, the tribal population is only a little more than one-third of the total population and divided into several language groups. Even if it is assumed that Tribals are solid in favour of formation of the

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

Jharkhand state, a major issue of this kind cannot be in our opinion, decided on the basis of the views of a minority (Para 618).¹⁶

General Election (1957)

Performance of the Jharkhand party and its image in the 1957 general election was not satisfactory as compared to the previous general election. The party retained the same number of 32 seats in the Bihar State Assembly but lost some reserved Scheduled Tribes seats. It was a clear indicator that it was losing its popularity among the tribal voters of the region. The Jharkhand party had failed in its demand for a separate state during and after the visit of the SRC in the Jharkhand areas. The Tribals of the region were disillusioned and disheartened on the eve of the 1957 general election, mainly because of the non-fulfilment of their demand for the separate Jharkhand state.

In the late fifties and early sixties, a large influx of non-Tribals took place during the said periods. From the demographic point of view, it affected the tribal population in the region very adversely. Politically, the new comers were in support of other political parties than the Jharkhand Party. This had its deep impact on the existing political scene of the region. Rapid development process in the region was demanding a radical programme for the Tribals. In the prevailing situation, however, the Jharkhand party could not cope with such a demand. But some leaders who were politically more conscious in the Jharkhand region began to argue that the Tribals needed a share in power to protect and promote their interests.

Jharkhand Party merged with the Congress

On 20th June, 1963, the Congress celebrated the merger of the Jharkhand Party with itself with triumph in a public meeting held in Ranchi. As the merger was unconditional, the Jharkhand Party lost all its identity, organisation and spirit. Nevertheless, in November 1968, there was a two day conference of all the Jharkhand Party leaders at Hazaribag. And the conference gave rise to a unified Jharkhand Party which was called the All India Jharkhand Party. But this did not last long.

¹⁶ Sahu, S.D. 1987: Proposal for Jharkhand State's Territorial Concept, No. 11, July 22, p.6

On 12th March, 1973, N.E. Horo, M.P. and President of the Jharkhandi Party, submitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister of India and demanded the creation of a new state of Jharkhand comprising (a) the region of Chota Nagpur and Santal Pargana in Bihar, (b) the districts of Purulia, Bankura and Midnapur in West Bengal, (c) the districts of Mayurbhanj, Keonjhar, Sundargarh and Sambalpur in Orissa; and (d) the districts of Raigarh and Surguja in Madhya Pradesh. This was the modified form of the original demand submitted by the Jharkhand Legislature Party to the State Reorganisation Commission in 1954.

Department of Tribal and Regional Languages (DTRL)

In continuation of the above initiative, the Department of Tribal and Regional Languages (DTRL) was created in May 1980 in the University of Ranchi. Dr. Ramdayal Munda became the first head of the department after his return from the University of Minnesota. An important activity of the department was to inculcate awareness among the Adivasi students, of contemporary developments in the rest of the country particularly in Assam and the hills of Darjeeling. There was a tremendous upsurge of literary output in the tribal languages and a great deal of writing books on politics in English and Hindi. Pamphlets and booklets were circulated among people, especially the elite, creating a greater awareness of the demand for a separate state of Jharkhand.

Formation of the All Jharkhand Students Union (AJSU)

The DTRL acted as an agent in the AJSU formation. The second general convention of the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) was held in Ranchi during April 26-28, 1986. In the convention it was decided to officially organise the Jharkhand students for the demand of a separate state of Jharkhand. Sibhu Soren, JMM President, proposed the name of Prabhakar Tirkey, Catholic member, to be the Jharkhand student leader in order to represent the Catholic and other non-Catholic Christian student groups. Similarly, Nirmal Mahato, JMM Secretary, proposed Surya Singh Besra as another student leader in order to represent the non-Christian student youth of the region. Drawing inspiration from the All Assam Students Union (AASU), the AJSU was officially formed as the JMM youth wing on 22nd June, 1986, at the Sonari Office of the JMM in Jamshedpur.

Initial Phase of AJSU

The aim of the AJSU was to create a *shoshan viheen* (free from exploitation) society through the Jharkhand movement. This was the one-point programme which did not permit any compromise in the movement. The ideology, organisational structure, strategy, leadership, mobilisation, etc. of the movement would be all geared up towards this aim. In the Jamshedpur convention on 22nd June, 1986, the main issue on which the AJSU focused its attention was that the *socio-cultural identity* and *self-respect* of the Jharkhandi society had to be recognised. This would be possible only by way of granting it a separate state of Jharkhand. The slogan used was: '*No Jharkhand No Election*'. It meant that if the Jharkhand state was not granted, election in the region would be boycotted. The AJSU leaders organised workshops at university and college levels for students. They did the same in rural areas at the *panchayat* and the *prakhand* (block) levels.

A conference of students and intellectuals of the region was organised by the AJSU on October 18-20, 1986, in Jamshedpur. Leaders of other groups supporting the Jharkhand movement were also invited. In this conference, the non-political party members emphasised the *cultural* aspects whereas the political party members stressed the *political* aspects of the movement. The slogans, '*No Jharkhand No Election*', '*Chunaavbaaz Neta Se Saavdhaan*' (Beware of a leader who is interested in electoral politics), were reiterated. It was proposed that the AJSU would remain free from the party politics as a united student organisation and the two organisations got separated from each other.

The militant image of the AJSU had shot up high by this time. The slogans used were: "Boycott 15th August celebrations", "Boycott 26th January celebrations". The slogans had led to an aggressive agitation and thereby revitalised the agitational programme for the Jharkhand state. The AJSU played an important role in bringing different Jharkhand groups together. It was instrumental in the formation of the Jharkhand Coordination Committee (JCC) on the occasion of the historic Ramgarh conclave on October 11-13, 1987.

Under the JCC's guidance, the AJSU with a good number of Catholics in it had clearly emerged as the leading force of the Jharkhand movement which took an aggressive posture under its student leadership. Its leaders took pledge to fight till the last to achieve the separate Jharkhand state. They declared: "Let the centre commence a process of dialogue with us", "Leave schools", "Stop corrupt leadership", "Those in services, give us one day salary in favour of the Jharkhand movement", etc. The Central Government sent instructions to the Commissioner of South Chotanagpur to initiate discussions with the AJSU and JCC leaders. A talk was held at the Commissioner's residence in Ranchi. The delegates threw light on the economic, social, political and cultural problems faced by the Jharkhandis. They emphasised the importance of the question of *cultural identity* and considered granting political autonomy to be the only solution to the problem.

According to the JCC declaration, strongly supported by the AJSU, demand for the Jharkhand state was based on the *Jharkhandi nationality* which meant the people living in the Jharkhand region. Thus, the autonomy demand was on the basis of the Christian and non-Christian tribals and the *Sadaans* inhabiting the Jharkhand area and owning it up as their own. In this current of thought, the long standing ethnic demand of the Tribals through the Jharkhand movement had decisively shifted to the regional demand with all its implications. However, the ideological contents of the movement were supposed to be *tribal values, identity and security*.

Ideological Leadership

The JCC led to reformulation of the movement's ideology based on tribal values. In common man's language, the term 'ideology' refers to a plan of action or a guideline for action in order to achieve a determined goal. However, ideology basically refers to ideas, values and beliefs of a particular community. It is that 'set of ideas and beliefs which seek to articulate the basic values of a group of people - what they cherish for themselves and for others - to the distribution of power in society' (Beteille 1980: 8). Ideas, beliefs and values are embodied in institutions

viz. family, marriage, castes, belief system, etc. of a group. These values are cherished and desired to be perpetuated to posterity. Perpetuating of the cherished values can best be done once a legitimate authority is assured. The Jharkhand leaders were made aware of this and were motivated to act accordingly.

Jharkhand State

From the 1970s, demand for the separate state of Jharkhand included the districts in Chhotanagpur and Santal Pargana in Bihar, 3 districts of West Bengal, 4 districts of Orissa and 2 districts of Madhya Pradesh with a population of about 4 crore people (Roy 2000: 3631). However, the present Jharkhand state was carved out of Bihar alone. The Jharkhand demand was clearly strong and alive in the Jharkhand region of Bihar whereas the other regions mentioned above remained in the periphery to a large extent. Besides, they formed parts of three neighbouring states thus making the demand and its fulfilment an uphill task.

The Jharkhand feeling was from below which was so strong that no manipulation from the top could suppress it. Even after buying its leaders, the movement could not be bought. At present the Jharkhand parties are weak but not the Jharkhand feeling which has forced national parties like the BJP and Congress to agree to the formation of this new state for their own political survival in the region.

After formation of the Jharkhand state on 15 November 2000, the first political party which came to power to rule over the new state was ironically the BJP which did not appear anywhere in the picture during the long history of Jharkhand movement. Recently, it had begun to talk about the state of *Vananchal* thus trying to confuse the old Jharkhand demand. In this political situation, it would be better for the Tribals in Jharkhand to have a form of governance in keeping with the tribal *Self-Rule* according to the Provision of the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996. This Act has two important premises: a) the community is the basic building block of the system of its governance and, b) a formal system can be built on the firm foundation of the tradition and custom of the tribal people.

Conclusion

Some major tribal groups, like the Uraons, Mundas, Hos, Khadias and Santals; using their basic human freedom in the second half of the 19th century made their decisive choice to join Catholicism in a big way. They did it freely. Catholic faith had a great appeal to them in liberating them from both inside and outside oppression. On the one hand, they were oppressed by some anti-human beliefs and practices operative from within their own traditional tribal religion. On the other hand, they were also oppressed by feudal type of dehumanising forces of landlords, petty chiefs, rulers and kings. They were liberated from both of these types of oppression through (a) proclamation of the gospel message of Jesus Christ by missionaries, Religious men and women, their catechists, teachers and other co-workers; and (b) promotion of social justice by providing them with sound legal aid. This was an integral liberation of Tribals.

This Catholic tribal movement was unique, historic and path breaking in the all round development of tribal societies forming the vibrant Catholic Church in the central zone of India during the 20th and now the 21st centuries. From the very beginning of this church, local vocations for its leadership in forms of priests, religious, bishops, etc. picked up in an increasing manner and continue even today and reach out to other parts of the country and beyond. Historically, this forms an important aspect of Catholic tribal movement which began in the second half of the 19th century.

Politically, examining the Jharkhand movement in its historical setting, it becomes amply clear that Christian missionaries in general and Catholic missionaries in particular were the first agents in bringing modern education to the Tribals of Jharkhand areas. From this education, socio-economic and political *knowledge* had its significant impact upon the Tribals and this knowledge in its turn both directly and indirectly *empowered* them to become their own leaders in the Jharkhand movement which lasted for almost seven decades. Together with modern education, the same missionaries were also instrumental in bringing about *social justice* in favour of the Tribals that gave them a sense of victory, respect and dignity in the prevailing socio-economic

and political situation at different points of their history in pre- and post-independence period of India.

However, it is clear that except Ignace Beck, Boniface Lakra and Prabhakar Tirkey, there have not been many prominent Catholic tribal leaders in tribal electoral political movement in the past till today though there have been Catholic tribals active in the movement no doubt. There has not been any Catholic tribal leader elected either to represent his/her community in assemblies and the parliament at both state and national levels from the central zone of India in the prevailing political dispensation during the last five decades. This is probably because Catholic tribals form minority and non-Catholic tribals form majority population in the region. Consequently, at election times party tickets are invariably given to non-Catholic candidates for contesting elections. Besides, corrupt money power with its brutal unethical use and the present day *Hindutva* ideology with its support to the Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP) play havoc against tribal and Catholic ethos in a very serious manner. While tribal ethos is deeply communitarian with its emphasis on equality and brotherhood supported by Catholic teaching, the electoral politics is full of cut throat competition and unhealthy individualism in order to fulfil one's own interests. This is a very sad irony concerning the leadership of Catholic tribal movement in recent and not so recent years without any clear promising future in this regard. How to cope with it poses a serious challenge before the Catholic tribals in their present and future movement.

Harikatha - **A Socio Religious Movement**

N. Uma Maheswari

Hari Katha or the story of Hari is a good example of how Hindus in India sustain their spirituality and devotion down the ages. Dr. Uma Maheswari (umasanskrit14@gmail.com) is a Sanskrit scholar, devoted to teaching and conducting programmes in spoken Sanskrit. As an ardent lover of Sanskrit, Dr. Uma has written and edited a number of books like *Vidyavahini* (2010), *Divyadhara* (2008), and *Aksharam* (2006)

*Yaavat sthaasyanti giraya: saritashca mahitale
Taavat Ramayana katha lokeshu prcalishyati
(Ramayana of Valmiki: I.2.34)*

“Ramayana katha will survive in this world as long as the rivers and the mountains remain.” This sloka found in Ramayana itself speaks about the eternity of the Epic. This prophecy has been more than abundantly fulfilled by the popularity of the Ramayana even today. Ramayana has influenced the thought and culture of the entire nation.

The term *Iti ha aasa* ‘This is how it was’ is itself very interesting because both the Indian epics, Ramayana and the Mahabharata are not just epics but the historical accounts of the kings who ruled over this *sacred land* India winning the adoration of the subjects and who were regarded as national heroes. These were *itihasas* because unlike the epic, which is the brain child of the poet, these two are the historical accounts where the authors themselves played significant roles.

It is necessary to know the origin of the epic Ramayana. The first four Cantos itself narrate the circumstances under which Sage Valmiki composed Ramayana. Sita was abandoned by Rama and was given shelter by Valmiki in his ashram and here she delivered the twins named

Kusha and Lava. These twins grew under the tutelage of Valmiki. Sage Narada encouraged Valmiki to write the story of Rama, who was an ideal king on earth. On a particular day while going to the river Tamasa for a bath, Sage Valmiki witnessed the pitiable condition of a female *Krouncha* bird whose partner was shot down by the arrows of a hunter. With the heart overflowing with the emotion of compassion for the bird, he cursed that 'the hunter would remain unhappy for a long time.'

*Maa nishaada pratishthaam tvamagamah shaashvati samaa:
Yat kraunca mithunaat ekam avadhih kaama mohitam*
(Ramayana of Valmiki's First Verse)

"O hunter, may you not get any good reputation (or may you get ill-reputation) for several years because, out of the pair of krauncha birds, you killed one, when it was full of passionate feelings."

Later when Valmiki was pondering over his outburst and subsequent curse to the hunter, he was surprised to note the metrical way in which the curse was pronounced. At this juncture, Brahma, the creator appeared before him and directed him to write the story of Rama in the same metre. Valmiki not only weaved the story of Rama in verse form but also taught the twins and prepared them to sing the story in an assembly, in the presence of the king Rama himself.

Two points are to be noted here. This is the story or the interpretation of the origin of the epic given in the epic itself. Whereas some historians are of the view that like the heroes of Mahabharata, Rama, king of Ayodhya, was also a popular and a righteous king whose virtues and adventures were sung by many bards who were in his court. These songs might have been collected and compiled into single beautiful piece of poetry by a person known as Valmiki and might have been taught to Kusha and Lava who later sang in the presence of Rama himself during the performance of the horse sacrifice, *Asvamedha yaga*. Incidentally, the term Kushi-Lava also refers to those who were bards in the courts of kings singing in praise of the kings and nobles. Some historians are also of the view that the twins Kusha and Lava were not taught by Valmiki but some bards *Kushilava* only actually

sang that, to receive rewards from the king, which was in practice those days. They are also of the view that deification of Rama and Krishna (who helped Pandavas to get back their lost kingdom) was to happen eventually since the epics had become so popular that every social function, gathering or a religious function had to have some bards narrating the story in tune with the up beat mood of the common public. Since both Rama and Krishna were regarded as incarnations of Hari (Vishnu) the discourses are termed as Harikatha.

Origin and development of the epic Mahabharatam

One of the branches of Krishna Yajur Veda mentions the union of kurus and panchalas and the famous historical battle between them which would have taken place much before 10th Century BCE. The famous conflict and battle songs describing the heroism of the pandavas were composed and sung by various poets of that time and seemingly handed down to the future generation by word of mouth and were recited in popular assemblies and public functions. Many references to this effect were made by the poets of later date.

There are many references found in the Mahabharata itself detailing the various stages of its development. It mentions Sage Vyasa as the composer of this work who taught to his disciple Vaisampayana who narrated it to Janamejaya at his snake sacrifice, Sarpayaga. Later, Ugrasravas narrated it to Saunaka and others in the forest called Naimisha.

At the first stage, it is suggested that it contained only 8000 verses dealing with the conflict between two tribes – the kurus and panchalas – and at the second stage, apart from the main story, the complete life-history of the Pandavas was narrated elevating them to a much higher level. It was at this stage that Krishna was regarded as the incarnation of Vishnu and the Hindus were predominantly Shaivites or Vaishnavites. Vishnu and Siva became prominent Gods. The third stage saw the elevation of the Pandavas as the national heroes. It is said that the present and final form and content of Mahabharata containing the verses covering many relevant side stories and sub-plots was fully developed during this stage and assumed an encyclopedic stature and

It was even termed as the Epitome of Dharma and the fifth Veda. This fact is recognized in the verse found in the Mahabharata itself:

Dharme ca arthe ca kaame ca mokshe ca Bharatarshabha
Yadihasti tadanyatra yannehasti na tat kvacit

“Whatever we find (referring to the 4-ideals of life Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha) in the Mahabharata may be found outside; what is not found here may not be found anywhere else.”

If we look into the developmental stages of Mahabharatam, we find that meticulous plans were chalked out to elevate the warring tribes – kurus and panchalas – to the national level and this was possible by the word of mouth. Every single opportunity of social gathering was put into optimum use to make their heroic deeds known to common folk and this was made possible by the bards and the exponents of the *Story of Hari* or *Harikatha*. It is here that we see the pivotal role played by the narrative discourses, called in many ways as *Prasangam* or *Katha Kalakshepam* or *Upanyasam* or, simply, *Harikatha*. Indians have always been adept in *storytelling* and this has been used as an efficient tool to propagate Indian culture, Hindu dharma and the Codes of Law.

Success of Harikatha

At a time when printing was not in vogue, everything was passed onto the laypersons through announcements in crowded places like temples, markets, and social gatherings. A powerful medium was required for the spreading of the Codes of Law and the achievements of national heroes like Rama and Arjuna. Unlike the persons who carried out announcements given by the royal personages, these things expected the announcer to be more authentic, dramatic, and fluent in Sanskrit and few vernacular languages, fairly knowledgeable and with acting skills. In short, he was the ‘one man army’ for demolishing the ignorance of the common man regarding the Dos and the don’ts of Hindu dharma, which were practiced by Rama, Krishna and the Pandavas, and for establishing the supremacy of the good over the evil. So the narration had to be gripping, interspersed with all emotions and sentiments and quotations from the original texts in Sanskrit and a few verses from the local tongue, to make it more effective and acceptable and understandable.

A Sanskrit verse may be quoted here to strengthen the point that *discourses or Prasangam* was part and parcel of daily life:

Praatah dyuta prasangena madhyahne stri prasangata:

Raatrau caurya prasangena kaalo gacchati dhimataam

“Great men spend time by talking about gambling at morning, discussing a woman at noon and contemplating on theft at night.” This verse narrates how people would spend their day. But one wonders how this could be the right pass-time of intelligent people. The word *Prasanga* means ‘the episode’ or ‘the talk’ or ‘discussion’ or may even mean a discourse. A closer look at the verse means that day time is spent on discussing the unpleasant outcome of the dice play mentioned in the epic Mahabharata (or in short, discussing Mahabharata), mid-day is spent on discussing the fight between Rama and Ravana over a woman i.e. Sita Or simply the great discourses on the epic Ramayana) and the late evening is spent usefully by intelligent men discussing the exploits of stealing i.e. the story of Krishna who as a small boy at Gokulam stole butter from the neighboring huts and as an avatar of Vishnu stole the hearts of all by annihilating the evil and establishing dharma on earth (or the episodes of Bhagavata Purana).

From the philosophical perspective, Rama and Krishna as avatars of Vishnu descended on earth for the protection of the good people and for the destruction of the evil doers. So ‘those who read about the greatness of the avatars of Vishnu and those who make others know Him by means of listening to the narratives (Prasanga or Pravachana) would be rid of their sins accumulated from many births which would bring them closer to the highest ideal in life, namely Moksha. This is invariably the pronouncement of the *benefit* added at the end of any religious text. This pronouncement brings into its fold the entire humanity whether learned or illiterate, rich or poor, and confirms the possibility of *oneness* with the ultimate truth. This is how the Harikatha i.e the story about Hari namely Vishnu in all His incarnations gained prominence and relevance in India.

Harikatha then and now

Right from the Vedic age, oral tradition has been adopted in India to transmit, disseminate and preserve the knowledge of the Vedas. In the

second phase, many didactic and profound philosophical matters also formed part of this oral tradition. Keeping alive this tradition and cashing in on the popularity of the two epics, many current affairs too slowly crept into the discourse. Since both epics eulogize great kings, description of modern day politics, discussion and debate about polity, economics, irrigation policy, comparison of the modern ruler with Rama or Krishna was freely done to attract the attention of the audience and to make the discourse more effective and contemporary. In the days when this was the only means of communication, bards or the Harikatha exponents were in great demand. The translation of Ramayana and Mahabharata was done in all Indian languages and these vernacular verses were also frequently quoted by them for the better understanding and appreciation of the story by the common man.

Harikatha or Pravachana or religious discourse which initially started with a view to spread the values enshrined in the stories of the epics to the masses and to entertain them during festive occasions, was later on used as a platform to defend Hinduism and protect Hindu beliefs from the onslaught of foreign invasions. Right from Alexander to the East India Company, presence of foreign invaders and rulers not only made changes in political scenario but effected considerable changes in religious and cultural arena too. This facilitated Harikatha or Katha kalakshepam to take a new turn, where this platform was used to unite Indians and to awaken Indians to the Indian-ness. This is the *new* phase of Harikatha. Despite political, religious, and cultural upheavals that have been witnessed by Harikatha, this movement, so to say, has not withered away but withstood all pressures and successfully steered out of all hurdles.

The third stage, if we may call it, was the phase when printing was introduced and books and all the reading materials were made available to lay people. Here Harikatha put on a new garb when 'n' number of books written by Harikatha exponents with the help of ghostwriters coupled with arresting images were printed and published. Leading newspapers too dedicated columns, which would speak of the popular tradition, beliefs and customs. Nonetheless, the original Harikatha style continued during the religious festivals and on other important occasions.

Children books like *Amar Chitra Katha* and *Chanda Mama* brought out Harikatha series.

Then there was the invasion of the electronic media. Audio and visual media gained much popularity. Radio, television and computers were considered a must in every household. The next phase of Harikatha is successfully launched in the serials of Ramayana and Mahabharata. With the introduction of smart phones, Harikatha exponents like Velukkudi Krishnan, Muralidhara Swami, Vishakha Har and others happily grabbed the opportunity, utilizing the modern social media to the maximum, circulating the audio and visual mini Harikatha on a daily basis. In addition to this, special websites were created where all the philosophical, religious queries were answered by experts. Modern technology has made it possible for Harikatha to reach large audience and create wider network with minimum effort. But Harikatha basically retains its content and flavor at all times.

Necessity of Harikatha

There had been a unique practice in those days to introduce the new creation of poets, especially the long-poems (padya kavyam), in the presence of kings and their ministers, nobles and renowned scholars. For instance, the Ramayanam of the Tamil poet *Kambar* was introduced in the presence of his patron Sadaiaappa Vallal. If it is a Drama (rupakam or drshya kavyam), its inaugural presentation was done on an auspicious day in the assembly hall of the patron – most probably consisting of the king, the ministers and the common people. In the drama *Malavikagnimitram* of poet Kalidasa, the Stage Manager or Sutradhara is in conversation with Nati, his assistant, stating that the play is to be presented before public on the Chitra festival, ushering in the summer season.

After the inaugural presentation and after gaining the permission from the patron, many copies would be made by the disciples and students of the poet and that would be eagerly bought by the learned and the affluent and would be treasured in their private libraries. Given such a background of owning copies of the poems and the dramas, pravachana or discourses like Harikatha was a soothing experience to the common masses.

Harikatha enjoys the patronage of both rural and urban people and of the government. Katha, Katha keertan, Shiva katha, Harikatha, Katha prasangam, upanyasam, Katha kalakshepam, Nama sankeertanam, etc. are the various names used for this. Under royal patronage, Harikatha was performed mostly before private audiences at the courts of the kings and the aristocrats though it was also performed in temples and in public places on important occasions. With the end of the royal patronage due to change in political scenario, it was nourished by the common people. Social messages, awareness programmes, educating common public in civic sense, policies of the government and much more are also done through this tested method.

The dawn of sophisticated media has not deterred people from patronizing Harikatha. Unlike many other traditional arts which are fast disappearing, Harikatha has successfully withstood the challenges of competitive modern art forms. Harikatha is the art which does not require a stage, costumes and other paraphernalia. A skilled person endowed with the ability to emote perfectly connects with his audience instantaneously and to feel its pulse. Knowledge coupled with great narrative skill, musical voice with good memory of the relevant verses from the Sanskrit and vernacular texts arrest the attention of the audience in no time. Flexibility of Harikatha offers fertile ground for the communicator to exploit. It helped strengthening the moral fabric of the society and educated the masses in the vital aspects of life. It gives complete freedom to artists to change the style of presentation as per the demand and mood of the audience and thus make the narration lively.

Ever-growing Harikatha

The history books trace the origin of Harikatha (in its present form) only to the 19th and 20th centuries, some stray references here and there, are made about the Bhakti (devotional) movement in 12th century AD which saw Alvars and Nayanmars, Meera and Andal and other poets propagating Bhakti or devotion by means of bhajans and discourses. But Katha forms should have existed from ancient times of the Brahmanas, Aranyakas and the Upanishads, wherein contain moral and other narratives.

Historians trace the origin of the Sanskrit dramas to the rare conversations one finds in the Vedas, like the conversation between Pururavas and Urvashi, Sarama and Pani, Yama and Yami. These conversations were the seeds of the later dramas, which in turn was the fore runner of Harikatha. For instance, Ramayana itself was sung by the twin sons of Rama in his court. The fact that Bhagavatam was narrated in seven days to King Parikshit (son of Uttara and Abhimanyu) was another proof of early stages of Harikatha. Bana Bhatta of 7th century AD speaks about the Harikatha in temples during his time. It is to be noted that Bana refers to the daily recitation of Mahabharata in the Mahakala temple of Ujjayini. An inscription from Kamboja, 6th century AD, states that copies of the epics Ramayana and Mahabharata and the Puranas were presented to a temple and arrangements were made for their daily recitation. During the Bhakti period, the spiritual ground saw the rise of Meera, the 12 Alvars including Andal, and the 63 Nayanmars. Carnatic music Trinity, Satguru Thyagaraja, Syama Sastri, and Muthuswami Deekshitar, all contemporaries in 18th and mid-19th CAE, composed songs in praise of Rama, Kamakshi and Kartikeya and with their mellifluous voices were spreading abiding devotion to God. From the 12th to the 18th century, singing pithy devotional verses like the Bhajans and other Paasurams and Kritis offered new resources to the singers and discourses. Praising the name of God through singing in praise of Rama and Krishna became a regular affair in many Hindu houses apart from the narration of the popular episodes of the two epics.

Many artisans travelled with the kings from one part of India to the other parts carrying with them their distinct style. With the passage of time, a blending of these styles happened to give birth to new styles which were more effective. For instance, Sarabhoji II, the King of Thanjavur, patronized such bards from Maharashtra and facilitated the gelling together of North and South Indian style. In Kerala, the social reformer Narayana Guru (19-20th CE) propagated 'One Family and One God' concept. This message was brought to the society in simple Malayalam in the *Paatakam* style, which was influenced by the Thanjavur Harikatha style. In Andhra Pradesh, Burra Katha, a

folk-art form narrates the mythological stories in a simple local language in tune with the beating of the drum, Burra.

Many temples have the grants to employ *Odhuvans* who would sing the devotional lyrics set in tune and *Pauranikas* who would narrate the mythological stories to the common people who visit the temples. In Bangalore, Karnataka, in the year 1964, an international conference was organized that brought together all such bard-singers of Karnataka. An association called *Karnataka Keertankara Parishad* was also formed to preserve this art form. Tamil literature speaks about the Valli kathai or Valli thirumanam being performed as a *street play* (veethi natakam or Therukkootthu or Villuppaattu), another style of Katha Kalakshepam.

Every country has an identity and ambition. This identity and ambition is reflected in the thought-word-deed of its citizens. Swami Vivekananda says that renunciation and spirituality would always be identified with *Indian-ness*. Yoga or meditation is prescribed for the control of one's mind and this psycho-physical harmony would put one on the path of renunciation. While this was from the individual's perspective, spirituality that teaches everyone to see the divinity in all and to wish good for others as one wishes for oneself, advocates prayer or collective prayer (koottu prarthana) for the upliftment of all individuals. This collective prayer is the Nama sankeertanam or the bhajan in praise of the personal God or Ishta devata. A measured look at the necessity and success of Harikatha and its various forms will be a proof for its ever-growing nature.

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The Clarion Call of *Anuvratas* - The Anuvrata Movement

Priyadarshana Jain

The *Anuvrata* movement, popularized and made vibrant by the Jaina Acharya Tulsi, is the hallmark of global Jainism in practice. It literally admonishes one to follow the ethics of *Ahimsa* in daily life. **Dr. Priyadarshana Jain** (priyadarshanajain@yahoo.in) is Head-in-Charge of the Department of Jainology, University of Madras. Specialized in Prakrit language and translation of Jain works from Hindi to English, Dr. Priya has authored *An Analytical Study of Upamiti Bhava Prapanca Katha* and *Fundamentals of Jainism* in 2008.

Introduction

When one hears about Jainism, the first few thoughts that ring in one's mind are Ahimsa i.e., non-violence, peace, vegetarianism and compassion. In this jet age of nuclear and biological weapons, threatened by terrorism and silent wars, and gripped by fear and insecurity, the crime rate is on the increase. In this context, the article tries to offer significant changes in the social and religious life of the people of India through the Jain social reforms as spelt in the *Anuvrata* movement.

Jainism is a way of life practised, preached and propagated by the Tirthankaras, i.e., the *path-finders* or *ford-makers*. Mahavira (6th BCE) was the last of the 24 Tirthankaras, whose immediate predecessor was Parshvanatha who preceded him by 250 years. References to Rishabhadeva, the first Tirthankara, called by many names like Adi Tirthankara, Adi Rishi, Adi Muni, Adinatha abound in the Harappa-Mohenjo-Daro excavations besides the Vedas and the Puranas. Mahavira is not the founder of Jainism as is generally understood. But he preached the same reality as preached by Lord Rishabhadeva.

The Philosophy and the Vrata Movement of the Jinas

A Tirthankara is known as the *jina* or the conqueror of oneself, one who conquered the inner foes and liberated himself from all mundane conditioning. The Tirthankaras reveal that the shackles of bondage and the subsequent rebirth have been caused by oneself since time immemorial through violence, ignorance, perversion, delusion, attachment, aversion, and the manifold passions. The purpose of human life is to seek an eternal, unobstructed, and infinite knowledge, vision, bliss, and power which are self-sovereign and self-regulated through the practice of the vows (*vrata*). The vows are non-violence (*ahimsa*), truthfulness (*satya*), non-stealing (*acaurya*), celibacy (*brahmacharya*) and non-attachment (*aparigraha*). Though these vows, taken at face value, appear to be merely abstentions from certain acts, their positive implications are extensive and they permeate the entire social life of the community.

All Tirthankaras preached and followed the great vows. The Tirthankaras brought about socio-spiritual-religious changes by informing people of their spiritual mission and disciplined life-style sustaining the universal principle of interdependence of all life. The Tirthankaras were succeeded by their prime disciples and heads (*Ganadharas*) and the scores of teachers (*Acharyas*). They informed that growth in science, technology, education and intellectual development was incomplete without the spiritual vision and mission that empowered people to be non-violent, compassionate, tolerant and ethical. They aimed at holistic and complete wellness of all members of not only the human society but all members of the environment as well, be it the micro or the macro forms of life. Their movement of spiritual sustenance was neither anthropocentric nor bio-centric but eco-centric wherein the right to life of each and every constituent of the cosmos was upheld. Both the monks and nuns and the lay Jains followed the vows at different levels of intensity. For the renunciators, it was called the *great* vows (*Mahavrata*) and for the lay Jains it was known as the *small* vows (*Anuvrata*). Thus the *vrata* culture continues to this day to serve the spiritual, religious, ethical, social and the environmental goals and objectives of mankind.

Emphasis on Right Conduct

The teachings of Mahavira are simple and practical, emphasizing code of conduct. Later they got developed into an intricate, philosophical system. The ultimate objective of his teachings is liberation or emancipation, which can be attained through the annihilation of the result of karma, attached to the soul. It can be achieved by the practice of austerities and preventing the influx of additional karma through self-restraint of the body, speech and mind. Liberation of the soul is a state of perfection and of infinite bliss, where there is no birth, death, disease, old-age or suffering. Besides his teachings of the five vows, his theories of 'relative pluralism', guide ethical thinkers today. His description of the range of mental states and 'psychic colors' are supported today by some psychic researchers and theosophists, as what we would today term science and psychology were as important to him as spiritual knowledge.¹

One of the most striking characteristics of Jainism is its concern with ethics, which has led some to describe Jainism as 'ethical realism', while others have called it a religion of Right Conduct. Jain ethics see no conflict between an individuals' duty to themselves and their duty to society. The aim of the Jain path is to facilitate the evolution of the soul to its 'highest capacity' and the means to achieve this through right conduct. The ultimate ideal of the Jain way of life is perfection in this life and beyond, yet Jainism does not deny mundane values but asserts the superiority of spiritual value. Worldly values are a means to the realization of spiritual values and the activities of everyday life should be geared to the realization of ultimate spiritual values (Dharma), leading to liberation (Moksha). Liberation is attainable through a gradual process of acquiring moral excellence, and Right Conduct is a very important element of the three-fold path of purification.

Ethics for a Jain is the *weaving of righteousness* into the very fabric of one's life. One may achieve different levels of Right Conduct in one's life: complete and partial. The complete commitment to Right Conduct entails the vigorous practice of Mahavira's teachings through the

¹ *Anuvrat Movement*, Ed by S.L.Gandhi, Pub by Anuvrat Vishva Bharati, Rajasthan

renunciation of the world and adoption of the ascetic life. For the majorities who have not renounced the world, it is still possible to seek the truth and pursue the path of righteousness, although to a lesser degree. This is the path of the laypersons, a more attainable form of social ethics. The two levels of commitment, of the ascetic and of the householder, are a characteristic feature of the Jain social and ethical structure.

The Ethical Code for Householders

Not everyone can renounce the world. People have social responsibilities and it is not possible for most of them to practice the vows with the same vigor and discipline of an ascetic. In the Jain conception of moral life we find a harmonious blend of the secular and the spiritual. The ethical code for laypersons is twelve-fold: the five vows are common to both the ascetics and the householders, and in the case of the householder they are the five minor vows (*Anuvratas*). In addition to the five minor vows, there are three *strengthening* vows (*guna vratas*) and four *disciplinary* vows (*shiksha vratas*). The *vows* enable the householders become more spiritual and virtuous, disciplined and detached, promoting a spiritual zest.

The Seeds of Anuvrata

There are around 14,000 monks and nuns today who follow the great path and continue to walk barefoot to drive home the message of the *vratas*. During the independence movement of India another movement called *Anuvrata* movement was taking shape. As time passed, old beliefs were making way to new ones. Dissatisfaction prevailed in all fields – social, religious and national. The *Anuvrata* Movement was born in the circumstances of loss of character and indiscipline. Emphasizing old vows and values, the movement gave a correct assessment of the prevailing situation. People felt assured because the movement was launched as both a diagnosis and a remedy to the prevailing malady.

Acharya Shri Tulsi and the Anuvrata Movement

During the making of the original draft, Acharya Shri and his companions did not imagine the wide impact the *Anuvrata* Movement

would cause, particularly among the Jains. Initially they had a modest desire to change the outlook of those in their immediate contact. These desired that people should regard religion not merely as part of worship but as an instrument of purifying character. They ought to be models of righteous living. This thought troubled his mind for a year or two. Occasionally it was also talked about. It finally matured in 1949. Keeping the lay householders in mind, a list of vows was drawn. Earlier, nine-point and thirteen-point programs were charted and propagated at an experimental basis. After thorough examination it was further expanded and, finally, an outline emerged and Acharya Shri launched the *Anuvrata* Movement on March 2nd, 1949 in Sardarshahar, Rajasthan State. The *Anuvrata* Movement was seen as a constructive endeavor towards a nonviolent multicultural society.²

Acharya Tulsi who started the *Anuvrata* Movement during the Independence era was born on June 20, 1914 at Ladnun, Rajasthan. He was designated as Acharya on August 26, 1936. He was initiated as the ninth Acharya in 1936. As the 'Messiah of humanity', Acharya Tulsi, was one of the most adorable torch-bearers of the spiritual tradition of India. The sole purpose of Acharya Tulsi's life was to preserve the national identity through penance and sacrifice. He evolved a code of conduct to humanize the entire humanity. He said, "If an atom bomb has in it the monstrous power to destroy the world, I want to tell the world that we have its counterpart in *Anuvrata* (a basic vow), which alone has the power to ward off and counter the threat of the atom bomb."³ The universal observance of *Anuvrata* alone can bring about a moral regeneration by creating a climate of peace, non-violence and amity.

The secret of the incessant flow of his vitality lay in his personality composed of the seeds of generosity. He expressed himself candidly and fearlessly on individual, social, religious, national and international issues. Acharya Tulsi worked for the upliftment of humanity through the propagation of the universal values coded in the *Anuvrata* Movement. He had been responsible for liberating countless women

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

from the shackles of long rules and burdensome ornaments. Similarly he dealt with the various evil practices like child-marriage, ostracizing widows, and feasting during death. His actions restored the dignity of women.⁴ He was a humanist and a great humanitarian and his mission to spread the message of non-violence, peace and international amity was sublime. The Jain Saint was looked as a beacon to light their path to a bright tomorrow, with peace and love reigning everywhere.

Anuvrata aims at creating a feeling of pure humanism and universal fraternity irrespective of the considerations of race, sect, gender, class, language, or religion. It is a code of conduct comprising small vows intended to inculcate moral values in people. By propagating a non-sectarian way, he gave a clear message that there is no fear for anyone from any religion, nor is there any danger to religion from anyone. His slogan, 'Let a human be human first, and then may he be called either a Hindu or a Muslim,' created a feeling of tolerance in people of diverse faiths and cultures. He believed that the real religion is to serve mankind alone. Acharya Shri realized that his experiment of enjoining the discipline of *Anuvratas* on the individuals was not possible merely through advocacy of the *Anuvrata* code of conduct. It must be accompanied by another effective tool that can gradually induce the person to introspect.⁵ Yuvacharya Mahaprajna came up with a bright idea of a unique technique of meditation called 'Preksha Dhyana' as a means to bring about mass psychological transformation. Acharya Shri added Preksha Meditation to his program of reconstruction of moral and spiritual values. Acharya Shri then launched a new scheme of 'Jivan Vijnana' (Science of Living) for educating youngsters in the doctrine of *Anuvratas* so that they may grow up as disciplined, broad-minded and responsible citizens free from the narrow prejudices of caste, colour, creed and sect. Continuing the *Anuvrata* Movement and Mission, Acharya Tulsi along with Yuvacharya Mahaprajna and their design of two tools of *Preksha* and *Jivan Vijnana* enabled the people to lead a meaningful life.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

While many western celebrities like Bertrand Russell and Martin Luther King were organizing huge peace rallies exhorting the people to raise their voice against the senseless genocide caused by the nuclear holocaust in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, by a strange coincidence, as it were, a relatively unknown Jain religious preceptor seated in a remote town of the *Thar* desert of Rajasthan, was engaged in a similar mission, though in a small way, of rousing the masses against violence and moral inertia. He heard the inner call that commanded him to throw off the yoke of sectarian dogmatism and launched a crusade against caste, untouchability, subjugation of women and religious intolerance. And he began his mission by carefully drawing up a code of conduct for all individuals in society.⁶

The movement strives after the middle path steering clear of the two extremes of absolute asceticism (*mahavratas*) and unbridled materialism resulting in moral torpor. *Anuvrata*, literally meaning 'small vows' has these objectives: 1) Anuvrat is the name of the minimum ethical code of conduct. 2) Anuvrat is the name of a religion free from sectarianism. 3) Anuvrat is a step raised towards the direction of changing our value system. 4) Anuvrat is the name of a condition which recognizes no gap between words and deeds. 5) Anuvrat is the name of the campaign for human solidarity. 6) Anuvrat is the name of a plan that reduces the gap between knowledge and conduct. 7) Anuvrat is a campaign for transforming human propensity for crime. 8) Anuvrat is a project for character-building. Anuvrat is a technique of self-introduction⁷.

The base of the movement is ultimately to be traced to a nine-point program and a thirteen-point scheme which were experimentally tried and accepted by 25,000 people. The nine-point program was: 1) Not to think of committing suicide; 2) not to use wine and other intoxicating drugs; 3) not to take meat and eggs; 4) not to indulge in a big theft; 5) not to gamble; 6) not to indulge in illicit and unnatural intercourse;

⁶ *Anuvrat to Global Ethics*, Pub by Anuvrat Golden Jubilee Celebration Committee, The Valliamal Institution, Madurai

⁷ Ibid

7) not to give any evidence to favor a false case and untruth; 8) not to adulterate things nor to sell imitation products as genuine; and 9) not to be dishonestly inaccurate in weighing and measuring. And the thirteen-point scheme was: 1) not to intentionally kill moving, innocent creatures; 2) not to commit suicide; 3) not to take wine; 4) not to eat meat; 5) not to steal; 6) not to gamble; 7) not to depose falsely; 8) not to set fire to buildings or materials out of malice or under temptation; 9) not to indulge in illicit and unnatural intercourse; 10) not to visit prostitutes; 11) not to smoke and not to make use of intoxicating drugs; 12) not to take food at night; and 13) not to prepare food separately for sadhus.⁸

Later on the *Anuvrata* code of conduct was designed as follows:

Anuvrata: Code of Conduct

1. I will not willfully kill any innocent creature: I will not commit suicide and I will not commit feticide.
2. I will not attack anybody: I will not support aggression and I will endeavor to bring about world peace and disarmament.
3. I will not take part in violent agitations or in any destructive activities.
4. I will believe in human unity: I will not discriminate on the basis of caste, colour, sect. etc., nor will I treat anyone as an untouchable.
5. I will practice religious toleration: I will not rouse sectarian frenzy.
6. I will observe rectitude in business and general behavior: I will not harm others in order to serve any ends. And I will not practice deceit.
7. I will set limits to the practice of continence and acquisition.
8. I will not resort to unethical practices in elections.
9. I will not encourage socially evil customs.
10. I will lead a life free from addictions: I will not use intoxicants like alcohol, hemp, heroin, tobacco, etc.
11. I will always be alert to the problem of keeping the environment pollution-free: I will not cut down trees and I will not waste water.⁹

⁸ *Anuvrat Movement*, Ed by S.L.Gandhi: Op. Cit.

⁹ Ibid

Six Decades of *Anuvrata Movement*

The movement runs through its course with a number of criticisms and reactions. And the movement undoubtedly gained by them. It faced two questions: Should it grow quantitatively or should it grow qualitatively? Acharya Shri chose the latter. At the time of its first session he said, "I have no liking for mere numbers. It does not matter how few or how many people become *anuvratīs*, so long as those who do become are the ideal ones. It is an important achievement when a morality-based movement keeps on marching ahead for more than sixty years without impediments. History bears it out that a movement loses its glow, but *Anuvrata* movement is relevant even today and is guiding us both in word and deed. It is because it represents the eternal truth."¹⁰

Among many reasons, the root cause of poverty and hunger is immorality. When a person is hungry, there begins immorality. Corruption becomes rampant and the craving for worldly riches robs the world of human values, *Anuvrata* served the spiritual and moral disquiet in man and society and continues to do even today. *Anuvrata* propagated among people truthfulness, creditability, non-communalism, and other universal values. It shook the consciousness of the age and called upon thousands of people to be part of that current. Since six decades the *Anuvrata Movement* has been engaged in the noble task of uplifting human life and revitalizing the rapidly crumbling moral and spiritual values. Though the movement does not lay claim on any spectacular success or achievement, there is no doubt of its universal appeal for self-awakening and change in outlook and behavior of many people.

Down the century, a number of leaders hailed and patronized this movement like the late Dr. Rajendra Prasad, C. Rajagopalachari, Jawaharlal Nehru, Dr. S. Radhakrishnan and Jai Prakash Narayan.¹¹ The great philosopher S. Radhakrishnan said, "We live in an age of spiritual drought and torpor of the soul. Young men are more inclined towards materialistic doctrines and any movement which recalls to us

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ *Anuvrat to Global Ethics*: Op. Cit.

the spiritual character of human nature is welcome. In our country the *Anuvrata* Movement is fulfilling this function. Its work, therefore, deserves encouragement.”¹² The popular leader Jaiprakash Narayan said, “We are really fortunate now that great personalities like Acharya Vinoba Bhave and Acharya Tulsi are leading us. Both these great public figures want to establish equality and tolerance by asserting the essential humanity of man and want to end all exploitation. Bhoodan (land donation as propagated by Vinoba Bhave) and the *Anuvrata* Movement are powerful agents in bringing about a change of heart and thus creating a nonviolent society. Acharya Tulsi has put forward a very good program. Vinoba and Tulsi belong to all castes and classes; both of them want to do good to everybody.”¹³

Acharya Shri Tulsi’s impact on the Indian community is due to the *Anuvrata* Movement which he had started. There was a general feeling in the country that while we are attending to the material progress and doing substantial work in that direction, we do neglect the *human* and *spiritual* side of true progress. A civilized human being must be free from greed, vanity, passion, anger. Civilizations decline if there is a coarsening of moral fibre, if there is callousness of heart. To make *Anuvrata* a mass movement Acharya Shri marched thousands of miles, met millions of people and gave several discourses in a day, throughout the year. Bearing the torch of *Anuvrata* he visited schools, colleges, offices, business centers in different localities and acquainted the public with the *Anuvrata* Movement. His disciples also worked a good deal in this direction. Once when he was in Lucknow he said, “The number of supporters and admirers of *Anuvrata* is very large. I am rather tired of hearing its praise. What I want to see is not supporters but *Anuvratists*.”¹⁴

The eleven codes of *Anuvrata* were a set of general precepts. Acharya Tulsi recognized that each sphere of the society has its own

¹² Acharya Tulsi – Fifty years of selfless Dedication – Anuvrat Movement (<http://www.herenow4u.net/index.php?id=89988>)

¹³ Ibid. (<http://www.herenow4u.net/index.php?id=89963>)

¹⁴ The Anuvrat Movement is Retrospect (http://www.jainsamaj.org/rpg_site/literature2.php?id=379&cat=42)

flaws. Considering the issues of each group in society Acharya Tulsi designed separate *Anuvrata* for each sector. Acharya Tulsi and Mahaprajna worked out Anuvratas for teachers, students, businessmen, politicians and others and moreover it was obligatory for every *Anuvrati* to practice the *Anuvratas* of the class concerned.

Anuvratas for Students

- I will not resort to unfair means in my examinations
- I will neither sabotage nor take part in violent activities
- I will not use obscene language, will not consume pornographic material
- I will not take drugs and intoxicants
- I will not resort to unethical practices in elections
- I will practice truth and honesty in my behaviour
- I will respect my parents and teachers

Anuvratas for Teachers

- I will strive to build my students' characters along with their intellectual development
- I will not provide illegal help to students to pass the examinations
- I will not promote immorality in my educational institution, nor will I encourage my students to take part in it
- I will not use drugs and intoxicants
- I will contribute one hour of my time at no cost to extend my students' education.

Anuvratas for Bussiness Class

- I will be honest in my business
- I will refrain from adulterating and counterfeiting goods
- I will not indulge in cheating or false measuring
- I will not smuggle
- I will abide by excise rules in importing and exporting goods
- I will not refuse to return any object or property of others secured with me

Anuvratas for Officers

- I will not accept bribes
- I will not abuse my authority
- I will neither delay nor be unjust in accomplishing my responsibilities
- I will not use drugs and intoxicants

Anuvratas for Employees

- I will be honest to my job
- I will not accept a post unless I intend to properly fulfil the job requirements
- I will find ways to overcome diverse opinions

Anuvratas for Election Candidates

- I will not seek votes using fear or bribery
- I will not indulge in the character assassination of my opponents
- I will not adopt illegal means during voting and counting of votes

Anuvratas for Voters

- I will not cast my vote out of fear or temptation
- I will not impersonate another voter

Conclusion

A significant factor that contributed to the success of the movement was Tulsi's charismatic leadership and the support of many politicians and intellectuals who contributed to the developing ideology of the movement. Acharya Tulsi made the concept of *Anuvrata* non-sectarian, applicable to people irrespective of their religion, gender or race and sparked a movement to build a society based on morality, peace and unity. To this day, *Anuvrata* inspires people to use self restraint to develop their character and at the same time work for a stable society. *Anuvrata* is a proven movement that shows that change in an individual leads to betterment of the society. It inspires people with the ideals of self-control and self-discipline. An *Anuvrati* is honest, trustworthy,

responsible, emotionally balanced, compassionate, caring, patriotic, and friendly to all. The spirit of *Anuvratas* suggests that there are immense potentialities in each individual to promote social unity by developing inner harmony and regulated spiritual evolution.